

# CJR

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JOURNALISM  
REVIEW

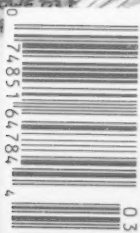
MARCH/APRIL 2003  
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WAITING  
FOR WAR  
SPECIAL REPORT



## THE NEWSPAPER SURGEON

DEAN SINGLETON AND HOW HE OPERATES




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A tour boat cruises past a cement plant on the Puget Sound's Duwamish Waterway. Fish and shellfish caught here had up to seven times more cancer-causing chemicals than those from environmentally clean sites.

## One newspaper exposed the ugly truth about pollution in Puget Sound.



Reporter: Robert McClure  
Reporter: Lisa Stiffler  
Photographer: Paul Joseph Brown

For 150 years, Puget Sound has provided the Seattle area with food, jobs and commerce as well as recreation and inspiration. In return, the region has treated the sparkling blue waters of the Sound like a sewer. Until recently, nobody paid much attention to the consequences of that destructive pattern. Then, in November, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer published a five-part series called "Our Troubled Sound."

For the first time, area residents became aware of the size and severity of the crisis. The series led to a public outcry for the government to take action. As a result, state and federal officeholders have vowed to stop the pollution and begin clean-up programs. This time, the eyes of the region will be on them.

Making waves when public health and natural resources are at risk is another way Hearst Newspapers make a positive contribution to their communities . . . and that's what excellence in journalism is all about.



To read more on this series go to [www.seattlepi.com/specials/sound](http://www.seattlepi.com/specials/sound)

  
**Hearst Newspapers**

# CJR

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MARCH/APRIL 2003

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—From the founding editorial, 1961

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**WAITING FOR WAR:**  
At the MSNBC  
television studio  
in Secaucus,  
New Jersey,  
a map of  
the Middle East  
holds center stage.

COVER: CHAD CROWE  
ABOVE: SEAN HEMMERLE



## CJR OPENING SHOT

### On the Brink

The maps are wired. Bright symbols will represent clashing armies and falling bombs. MSNBC is ready. So are CNN and CBS, the *Chicago Tribune* and *Stars and Stripes* — and all the outlets and reporters who will cover a war that, at press time, seems very close. And as we pause on the brink, some of us will look back and consider how well we facilitated a full debate about the necessity of the war. The quality of that debate, after all, has

been dependent on hard reporting about indistinct things, like the nature of the threat from Iraq and the potential aftermath of the fighting. We will describe the battles if we can, and we'll record the cries of the civilians. But the reporting *before* an optional war is even more necessary than following the action or counting the dead. In this issue we view the press on the road to war from four angles, starting on Page 14. Ted Gup considers how we deal with

intelligence secrets held out as the proof of a need for combat. Vivienne Walt reports on the censors of Baghdad, how they try to shape stories using the power to withhold access. Liz Cox takes a peek inside the war reporter's backpack. And Andrew Bushell takes a look at the new rules of coverage that the Pentagon has put forth, rules that may or may not let us watch this war from up close, right where we say we want to be.

## CJR

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## DREAMCATCHERS

Let's see. The young journal-  
ists you tapped to imagine  
their Dream Newspaper (CJR,  
January/February) say it  
would be "tabloid format,"  
with "more questioning of au-  
thority," more "magazine-  
style, narrative pieces," less  
objectivity, and would "up the  
flippancy factor" and "throw  
in the f-word every once in a  
while." It would have "more  
examination of pop culture,"  
tell readers "how to spend  
their leisure time" and cover  
"subcultures and alternative  
life-styles." Best of all, it would  
be free.

As a twenty-six-year-old, I  
couldn't agree more. But  
someone should tell your  
young journalists that their  
dream papers already exist.  
They're called alternative  
weeklies.

KEVIN HOFFMAN  
Staff writer, *Scene*  
Cleveland, Ohio

While admiring the enthusi-  
asm of young reporters to cre-  
ate a newspaper of their  
dreams, I found the lack of a  
call for a vigorous agenda for  
local coverage disappointing.  
The absence of any mention  
of dealing with major issues  
that face local communities —  
poverty, racism, poor educa-  
tion, homelessness, and inade-  
quate low-income housing —  
suggests to me that the dream  
newspaper isn't much better  
than what we now have in  
most communities. The agen-  
da set by those who partici-  
pated struck me as a desire for a  
more cosmetic makeover  
rather than a radical change  
for newspapers to make them  
more relevant to all ages. My  
experience tells me that people  
thirst for interpretive infor-  
mation about who and what  
influence major public deci-  
sion-making. I also did not get

any flavor of a passion to rep-  
resent those who most need  
help.

ROLDO BARTIMOLE  
Cleveland Heights, Ohio

*The editors reply: Bartimole  
has every right to be disap-  
pointed that the young journal-  
ists did not emphasize local  
coverage, but to characterize  
their ideas as primarily "cos-  
metic" is inaccurate. These are  
not cosmetic changes: "more  
pounding the pavement, more  
questioning of authority, and  
more diversity in sources and  
staffing"; more international  
coverage, and coverage that is  
less jingoistic and includes a  
human face; stories that help  
citizens understand a state  
budget crisis, for example, or  
hold a politician accountable  
for broken campaign promises.*

## RISING CHORUS

I can't praise you enough for  
your editorial, "The Silence of  
the Lambs" (CJR, January/Fe-  
bruary), on the danger to diver-  
sity posed by the FCC's stance  
on deregulation. Contrary to  
your belief, however, that jour-  
nalists aren't covering this  
story, it is getting plenty of  
play, albeit not in the main-  
stream press on which CJR  
mostly focuses its gaze. The  
issue has been brought up re-  
peatedly by Fairness and Accu-  
racy in Reporting, and by the  
radio show, "Democracy  
Now," which is carried on the  
Pacifica Network and its many  
local affiliates. It is discussed at  
numerous media watchdog  
sites that are part of the "media  
democracy" movement.

JEFF FOX  
Paramus, New Jersey

We at The Newspaper Guild  
don't take exception to the  
overall thrust of your com-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 51



## APPOINTMENTS AT CJR

Evan Cornog is the new publish-  
er and Dennis Giza deputy pub-  
lisher in moves that will  
strengthen the CJR business team.  
Cornog's magazine experience,  
knowledge of the foundation  
world, and familiarity with the  
university, combined with Giza's  
twelve years of experience as as-  
sociate publisher of CJR, give us a  
powerful organizational base to  
tackle financial and marketing  
challenges. I will be assuming the  
new title of chairman, and will  
remain editorial director of CJR.  
Cornog retains his role as associ-  
ate dean for policy and develop-  
ment at the journalism school.  
At CJR he will report to me, as will  
Michael Hoyt, CJR's executive ed-  
itor.

— David Laventhol

## POWERREPORTING AND CJR

We are also proud to announce  
that Columbia Journalism Review  
is joining forces with PowerRe-  
porting.com, a premier research  
Web site for journalists. PowerRe-  
porting has chosen and annotat-  
ed thousands of resources, orga-  
nized by beat (Aging, Agriculture)  
and by type (phone books, public  
records). It will now have a home  
at [cjr.org](http://cjr.org), replacing (and incorpo-  
rating) our "Resource Guides." Bill  
Dedman, the Pulitzer Prize-win-  
ning investigative reporter, a con-  
sultant to *The Boston Globe*, has  
been building the site since 1997.  
CJR's interns will update the site  
under his supervision.

# TELEVISION MORE IS LESS

*Centralized News Operations Are About Money, Not Journalism*

BY PATRICK ROGERS

**T**elevision news executives have their orders: find more viewers, raise profits, and, oh, by the way, do it with fewer people in the newsroom. One result is that although news is everywhere today, much of it is blandly similar. Now, three second-tier players in the broadcast world are heading down a path blazed recently in radio: repackaging news cheaply through centralized editorial operations, then beam it out to stripped-down stations.

All three are launching broadcast news services that use technology and mostly recycled news to create new advertising markets — without creating much new journalism. ■ Sinclair Broadcast Group, Inc., based in Hunt Valley, Maryland, is test-marketing *News Central*, a one-hour mix of local and national news, at its Flint, Michigan affiliate, WSMH-TV. The idea is to eventually expand *News Central* to all sixty-two affiliates.

*News Central* leads with a segment of local news produced and anchored from Flint. Then viewers get a dose of national and international news, sports, and weather produced and anchored in Hunt Valley. The catch is that most of the Hunt Valley "content" is not original, but rather comes from other Sinclair affiliates or a CNN feed. Sinclair does plan to open bureaus in Washington, D.C., and possibly in New York, and will add a bare-bones news staff at those stations that currently don't have newscasts. Mark Hyman, Sinclair's vice president of corporate communications, says that eventually more of the *News Central* report will be original.

Since about half of Sinclair's stations have no newscast at all, the company is increasing the reach of its journalism. But on the other hand, news staffs will be trimmed at affiliates by about a third — with more of the newscast produced centrally, the affiliates won't need as many reporters and producers.

The addition of news at affiliates currently without it will allow Sinclair to sell more advertising. "About 30 to 35 percent of the advertisers out there buy ad time only on the news," says Hyman. "So it is not good business just to be a non-news station."



■ American News Network, the brainchild of Vincent Castelli, the CEO of Prism Broadcasting Network, which owns and operates two TV stations in Atlanta, offers national news to independent stations that can't afford to produce it themselves. ANN buys news from ABC, produces two daily one-hour newscasts, and beams them to news-less stations free in exchange for a percentage of the advertising sold during the newscasts. Castelli says national ad rates start at around \$1,000 for a thirty-second spot, but can climb much higher depending on the size of the market and other factors.

ANN also offers stations their own five-minute local newscast — produced and anchored in Atlanta from local feeds and then fed back to local stations. The stations provide the raw video and copy — through deals with local news radio, newspapers, or free-lancers — and ANN polishes it up and has an anchor deliver it in front of a virtual skyline, a graphic of whatever town the station serves. Castelli says so far about forty stations have signed on.

■ Gannett's plan, in the early stages of development, will also provide another avenue for ad sales. The idea is to repackaging local news from its twenty-two affiliate stations across the country and air it on a cable network. America Today is aimed at people who move away from their home town, but still want to keep in touch with what is going on there. "In every American city of consequence there is a fairly large number of people who are from somewhere else, or who have friends or family somewhere else," says Roger Ogden, senior vice president of Gannett's television division.

America Today will work on a grid, and viewers can find their hometown news at the same time every day. "We still have to do a lot of negotiating with the cable companies to support it," Ogden says.

**T**here is an argument that such services will expand local news options in smaller markets. After all, towns that had no local news can now get it, and there will even be a bit of original reporting in some places. But if this were really about a dearth of local TV journalism, why not hire more reporters and let them do their job?

"It's a business concept first," says Rick Rockwell, who teaches journalism at American University in Washington, D.C. "You're trying to find new business models to generate advertising in a very poor advertising climate. I can understand why it makes sense to these guys." ■

Patrick Rogers is a free-lance writer who lives in Virginia.

**DART** for Fifth Amendment journalism, to:

**THE ASIAN WALL STREET JOURNAL.** On November 26, the paper ran a letter from a reader pointing out that Michael Alan Hamlin's November 22 review of a book by Ivan P. Hall entitled *Bamboozled! How America Loses the Intellectual Game with Japan and Its Implications for Our Future in Asia*, had misstated the dates of two historic earthquakes in Japan.

As originally submitted, the letter had fairly noted that the inaccuracies "may be [the reviewer's] or may come from Hall's work"; but as published in the *Journal*, the letter contained no such qualification. It did, however, contain thirteen words fabricated by the *AWSJ* and put into the letter-writer's mouth: "These errors suggest Mr. Hall's facts can be as dubious as his theories." Distressed by the clear — and demonstrably false — implication that the wildly off-the-mark errors had been his, Hall began writing to the *Journal's* editors, requesting a correction that never came. Only in a letter from Hall himself, stating that the errors were the reviewer's, did that fact finally, on January 17, find its way into the *AWSJ*. References in his letter to the paper's gratuitous fabrication, however, did not.

**THE MESABI DAILY NEWS.** On Sunday, November 24, a piece appeared on the front page of the *St. Petersburg Times* by reporter Scott Barancik tracing the sorry history of a deal in which Sykes Enterprises, a customer service company based in Tampa, opened — in exchange for millions of dollars in cash, land, and construction incentives — a 432-seat call center in rural Eveleth, Minnesota, that it was now, only two years later, about to close. On Sunday, December 1, the *Times* piece appeared (without permission) on the front page of Minnesota's *Mesabi Daily News*, almost — but not quite — word for 2,500-word. While giving full attribution to the *Times*, to Barancik, and even to the *Times's* researcher, the purloined version excluded this: "An editorial in the *Mesabi Daily News* called the economic incentive package 'a wise investment.'"

**THE OMAHA WORLD-HERALD.** On Election Day 2002 and on the following day as well, the paper carried long, detailed articles, colorfully illustrated with photos and maps, about the general success of the high-tech voting machines, made by Election Systems & Software, debuting in state and local jurisdictions around the country. Both articles took pains to note that "ES&S is a privately held company owned by employees and private investors [including] World Investments, a division of the Omaha World-Herald Co., which publishes the World-Herald." On Friday, November 8, the paper carried a brief follow-up: "A computerized counting system," the report noted vaguely, "failed on Election Night Tuesday, forcing Adams County officials to call in technicians with Election Systems & Software, an Omaha company." Period.

**LAUREL** to **THE RECORD**, for spilling the dirt about New Jersey's water. Splashed across the front pages of the Bergen County paper last fall was "The Danger Beneath,"

an investigative series by reporters Matthew Brown and Jan Barry that unearthed case after case in which service stations, factories, dry cleaners, and heating-oil storage tanks have for years been illegally leaking carcinogenic chemicals into rivers, streams, and wells while officials treaded water and pollution spread. Particularly hard to swallow was the series' revelations concerning one Charles P. Shotmeyer, who, together with his brother, a former chairman of the county GOP, owns numerous area gas stations. Apparently the repeated (and largely ignored) citation of most of those stations by the Department of Environmental Protection was not perceived as a problem when Shotmeyer was appointed in 2000 to the North Jersey District Water Supply Commission, the agency that oversees the state's largest public water system. But that and other embarrassments have now been brought to the surface, and the ripple effect has begun.

**DART** to the **BUFFALO NEWS**, for roaming too far from the journalistic range. In past months, the paper has had plenty of discouraging words to report about the grim economic realities of upstate New York — the shut-down businesses, the lost jobs, the exodus of talent, the disappearing services. So imagine the surprise when, smack in the middle of the crucial reelection campaign of Governor George Pataki, a new book, *Upstate New York: Corridor to Progress*, showed up around town. Published by Cherbo and "sponsored by" the powerful Business Council of New York State Inc., the book — described by the council's president as a "love letter" to the region's "great quality of life," "dynamic business community," and "economic vibrancy" — was written, according to the press release, by Stephen W. Bell, managing editor of the *Buffalo News*. As Bruce Jackson summed it up in his online newsletter *Buffalo Report*, "When his bosses at the *News* okayed this extracurricular employment, did they . . . ask how he could make nice for the big business lobbying organization and at the same time objectively oversee reporters who are examining the region's most recalcitrant economic, political, and ecological problems?"

**DART** to **THE ARGUS-PRESS**, for bad casting. The Owosso, Michigan, paper presented a front-page, above-the-fold, unbylined article about a prize-winning feature at an international film festival — the screening, the award, the distribution, the cast of characters (with their previous television and movie credits), the production company, the company's other current and future titles (one "in the vein of *A Beautiful Mind* with Russell Crowe"), and the names and locations of local video stores where they were, or were in negotiation to become, available for rental. Mentioned numerous times in connection with his various contributions to the film company as writer, producer, director, and actor was one Anthony Hornus (who also appeared in the four-color photo on the paper's front page). Not mentioned at all was Hornus's other starring role: he is the paper's metro editor and the writer of the piece.

**Darts & Laurels** is written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's deputy executive editor. Nominations: gc15@columbia.edu, 212-854-1887.

## What's in the Water?

*New Rules Make It Harder for Reporters (or Anyone Else) to Find Out*

Much has been made lately of the proliferation of government secrecy. Whether our receding rights to information serve the cause of national security and how much the one weighs against the other are not always easy questions to answer. But what cause does secrecy serve when it conceals potentially fatal environmental risks?

The problem is manure: millions of tons of it produced on American factory farms every year. Much of this waste winds up poisoning the nation's lakes and waterways, and is suspected in over a hundred deaths and thousands of hospitalizations, as *The Dayton Daily News* reported in a recent series on mega-farms. The courts have taken notice, and last December the Environmental Protection Agency just met a deadline to improve runoff regulation under the Clean Water Act. The agency's solution — leaving regulation to the states — underwhelmed environmentalists. For journalists, though, one provision stood out: the waste-management plans that are supposed to solve the problem will be written by the farms themselves, and kept by them on-site. And rather than reporting their discharge to regulators once a month or quarterly, as most factories and sewage plants do, the farms will report once a year.

Or maybe they won't. While the EPA was effectively putting the fox in charge of the henhouse, the 2002 federal farm bill moved pollution management even further from scrutiny. Under the new law, farms that come to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for money for environmental problems are as-



sured that the information in their waste-management plans will be kept secret, not only from the public, but from regulators like the state and federal EPA. Now, we haven't yet seen what happens if a farmer tells the EPA that it can't have his pollution-management plan because it's protected by the USDA. But when the *Daily News* reporter Ben Sutherly tried to find out the dimensions of

the manure lagoon at a farm he suspected of evading regulation, the USDA denied his Freedom of Information Act request for the farm's waste-management plan. As a result of the 2002 farm bill, it said, that information is proprietary. The paper is considering an appeal.

All this creates a "pretty disturbing gap" in what was supposed to be the government's strategy for regulating farm pollution, says Ken Cook, founder and president of the Environmental Working Group. "To have a veil of secrecy that would make it harder to check if the environment is being protected, is political cowardice." We couldn't agree more.

The USDA has a history of siding with farmers against FOIA requests. What is new, and gives all these provisions troubling strength, is the Bush administration's practice of denying FOIA requests whenever possible (see *CJR*, January/February 2002).

That places the burden on lawmakers to put FOIA protections in black and white — something that could have been done in the farm bill — and on journalists to make sure we know when they don't.

MARTIN KRAVITZ

## Thunder in Illinois

*The Death Penalty and the Power of the Press*

If anyone doubted the awesome power of a focused press, then the dedicated efforts of the *Chicago Tribune* reporters, student journalists at Northwestern's journalism school, and others, which ultimately persuaded Governor George Ryan of Illinois to clear out his state's death row, should end the doubting. Shortly after taking office, Ryan, a longtime death-penalty supporter, watched on TV as Anthony Porter — who was exonerated of a double murder after the students proved his innocence — jumped into the arms of David Protess, the students' teacher, as a free man. Ryan cited the students in his January 11 speech announcing that he would commute the sentences of 167 prisoners. The governor also paid tribute to the *Tribune's* November 1999 series by Steve Mills and Ken Armstrong, which examined every death-penalty case and described a system "so riddled with faulty evidence, unscrupulous trial

tactics and legal incompetence that justice has been forsaken."

It was a massive indictment, and in 2000 Ryan halted executions in Illinois, appointing a commission to propose reforms. Over the next two-and-a-half years, the state legislature ignored both his pleas to narrow the death-penalty law and the commission's eighty-five proposals.

But the journalists' efforts had an effect on the man who counted. The *Tribune's* writers, columnists, and editorial writers; the student journalists and their TV and print collaborators; the *Chicago Reader's* John Conroy and his 1990 article on police commander Jon Burge's torture tactics at Chicago's Area 2 — they all played a role in exposing a flawed system "haunted by the demon of error," as Ryan put it. The press showed the way, and Governor Ryan finally knew what he had to do and was impelled to act.

## SEATTLE: A GOOD (BAD) YEAR

Did the *Times* Hire to Lose Money?

CHOICES: Seattle is a two-paper town, but red ink threatens the JOA that keeps it that way.

Journalism job-seekers were pretty much out of luck in just about every city in America last year — except one. While news organizations across the country froze salaries and laid off experienced pros, *The Seattle Times* went on a hiring spree, expanding its editorial staff by a remarkable seventy-one positions.

The *Times* wasn't spending so freely because it was flush with profits — the newspaper has lost money for the last three years. For most companies, massive hiring in the face of that much red ink would seem counterproductive. But losing money three years straight might give *The Seattle Times* a way to slip out of its joint operating agreement with the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and kill off the competition. Which raises a question: Did the *Times* add all those journalists' salaries to ensure it lost money in 2002?

Under their unusual JOA, either newspaper can seek to terminate the contract if it loses money

three years in a row. The *Times*'s owner and publisher, Frank Blethen, says he is weighing whether to initiate that clause in the contract, which would set in motion eighteen months of negotiations aimed at eliminating one newspaper and sharing the survivor's profits. Under the current contract, if the *Post-Intelligencer*'s owner, Hearst Corp., agreed to shut down the *P-I*, it would get 32 percent of the *Times*'s profits through 2083. But if no agreement were reached, the JOA would end, leaving the *Post-Intelligencer* without a printing press, a circulation structure, or an advertising team — and with little hope of survival.

Blethen has indicated he believes Seattle can support only one newspaper — and he intends that it be *The Seattle Times*. At a company meeting last fall, he told staff members about the clause and said, according to several media reports, including one from the *Times*, "If the *P-I* doesn't invoke it, we will." Blethen declined interview requests from CJR.

If the *Times* does invoke the clause, Hearst asserts it will not simply walk away from Seattle — particularly since the company is guaranteed 40 percent of combined revenue under the current JOA. Hearst has been publishing the *Post-Intelligencer* since 1921 "and intends to continue to do so," a Hearst spokesman, Paul Luthringer, said. "We do not believe either party has a basis for terminating the Seattle Joint Operating Agreement."

One possibility is that Hearst would take the *Times* to court to try to prevent it from invoking the clause. In this scenario, Hearst might try to force the *Times* to prove it lost money all three years and, failing that, argue that the *Times* intentionally tried to lose money through excessive hiring. Another possibility, raised in a February 8 *P-I* story, is that the U.S. Department of Justice may block the move on the ground that closing one newspaper and paying the owner of the other a share

of the survivor's profits would violate antitrust law.

A *Times* spokeswoman, Kerry Coughlin, points out that although the paper did a lot of hiring in 2002, the company had downsized about 20 percent in 2001 because of a strike and the recession. The hiring, she says, was aimed only at returning to past staffing levels. The *Times* raised the newsroom staff from 295 to 366 employees in 2002. But, she points out, that's still eight fewer editorial positions than the *Times* had before the strike in January 2001.

Moreover, she said, *The Seattle Times* was able to expand its staff last year because it saved money by refinancing its debt. "The reason we were able to add those positions last year," she said, "was that the family made a critical decision to reinvest in the long-term future of the company."

In an internal memo to his staff dated January 7, Blethen said the hires were necessary "to rebuild the business to preserve our reader base and protect our franchise."

Still, the newspaper analyst John Morton, who has consulted for Hearst, says the *Times*'s staff expansion was highly unusual in such a tough fiscal climate, particularly for a newspaper losing money. "I'm not aware of any other newspapers that have staffed up to this degree," he said. "It's exceptional."

The *Times* emphasizes that it has hired people only to cover what it sees as core, strategic areas for the newspaper. So perhaps it was a telling sign when, in January, the paper hired Bill Richards, a former *Wall Street Journal* reporter, to cover the JOA. It should be an interesting beat.

— Jonathan Dube

## OLD NEWS

### How Three Papers Count the Years

To the casual reader, three newspapers seem to bill themselves as the nation's oldest. Can they all be right? CJR investigates.

#### Hartford Courant.

*Hartford Courant*

Claim: America's Oldest Continuously Published Newspaper

Evidence: The operative word is "continuously." The *Courant* started as a weekly newspaper in 1764 and had the largest circulation of any newspaper in the American colonies during the Revolutionary War. After the British burned down its paper mill, the *Courant* printed a few issues on wrapping paper while a new mill was being built. It went daily in 1837.

Verdict: The most seamless continuity CJR could find.

#### NEW YORK POST LATE CITY FINAL

*New York Post*

Claim: America's Oldest Continuously Published Daily Newspaper

Evidence: The operative word is "daily" (which Lachlan Murdoch sometimes forgets to mention). It was founded in 1801 by Alexander Hamilton, the first secretary of the treasury, surviving in spite of periods of near financial collapse, predictions that it would go under, and a long 1962-63 New York newspaper strike.

Verdict: As long as the *Post* uses "daily" in its claim, it is accurate.

*New Hampshire Gazette*

Claim: The Nation's Oldest Newspaper™

Evidence: Founded in Portsmouth in 1756. Many history texts refer to it as the oldest newspaper in the country, even though it was discontinued in 1861 for about two years. In 1960 the *Gazette* was merged with the *Portsmouth Herald*, which looked like the end of the *Gazette* since the *Herald* didn't alter its name. But the *Herald's* masthead stated "Continuing the New Hampshire Gazette," and in 1989 the *Gazette* regained its independence. During the next ten years, it was published episodically, with a press run of only a few hundred copies, notes the *Gazette*, in a recent history column. In 1999 the paper went biweekly.

Verdict: The *Gazette* doesn't use "continuous" in its claim, which is proper.

But two newspapers in Maryland and Virginia, both named *Gazette*, started earlier and remain in existence today, although both ceased publication on several occasions. The *Maryland Gazette* was begun as a weekly in 1727 by "America's oldest publishing company" and is now published twice a week, while *The Virginia Gazette* published its first edition in 1736 and called itself "America's oldest weekly" until it also went to twice-weekly publication in 1984. CJR couldn't find a newspaper claiming to be "America's oldest twice-weekly newspaper."

— Adeel Hassan

#### THE New-Hampshire GAZETTE

Continuing the English, American, Foreign and Domestic

## SOUND BITES

*"It's not like there was ever a philosophical decision not to cover it. The question was raised. Now it will be covered."*

A spokeswoman for Dow Jones after the company agreed to pay for contraception in all of its health plans. The settlement ended a sex discrimination suit filed in April 2002 by three female employees after a yearlong campaign by the employee union to get coverage had received nary a word from company officials.



*"In a map on Wednesday's Local/State front, the Indian River was mislabeled as the Atlantic Ocean."*

— *Florida Today*, Melbourne, Florida, December 12

*"Due to an editing error, a quotation from King Hedley II was misstated in Diane Carman's column in the Denver and the West section Tuesday. It was changed to 'God is a bad mother.' The actual quotation is 'God is a bad mother (expletive deleted).'"*

— *The Denver Post*, February 12

## LANGUAGE CORNER

### THAT OLE DEVIL "LIKE"

No, not the one in "John likes Mary." And not the weird but widespread affliction of such expressions as "It's, like, cool"; that's not worth talking about. Our topic is the "like" that compares things. This one, by continuing consensus, was wrong:

"... like Edwards and his Jets did ..."

"Like" means "similar to," which obviously wouldn't work in the fragment above. The rule of thumb: Don't use "like" if what follows is a noun (including a name) or pronoun that is the subject of its own verb. So it should be "as Edwards and his Jets did" or — it often sounds more natural — "the way" they did. In speech, the form "like they did" is virtually universal. For even moderately formal writing, our rule of thumb remains the safest bet. At least for now.

Confusion seems to arise about "like," though. Consider "... the current wave of terror, as the ones before it, represents ..." Someone — writer or editor — was afraid of "like." But the phrase between commas has no verb of its own; "wave," despite the parenthetical interruption, is the subject of the verb "represents." "Like the ones before it" was the only way to go.

— Evan Jenkins

A lot more about writing is in Language Corner at CJR's Web site, [www.cjr.org](http://www.cjr.org).

## KEEPING "TRAC"

## A Tool For Mining Federal Data

John Ashcroft's hostility to the Freedom of Information Act is well known, so it came as little surprise last fall when the Justice Department announced that it would no longer release information about the number of terrorism cases it refers for prosecution. The stated reason was security. In the new war on terrorism, wrote a department lawyer, such information might tip off terrorists to an investigation, and endanger lives.

For some senators, however, that explanation did not wash. Only months earlier, Congress had used that information on the FBI's focus to demonstrate a continued reluctance by the agency to shift its priorities from investigating bank robberies and narcotics cases to terrorism. And *The Philadelphia Inquirer* had used the data to show that the FBI was artificially inflating the number of cases it defined as "terrorism" by including garden-variety crimes like drunk airline passengers and prison riots.

Both the irritated congressmen and the grateful journalists got the FBI data from an often-overlooked nonprofit that has been shining a light into the dark corners of the federal government since 1989. Called TRAC, or the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, this Syracuse-based partnership between a statistician and a former *New York Times* reporter regularly mines gems from the federal bureaucracy, using FOIA, and posts the information to a vast online database. An enterprising journalist could use TRAC stories ranging from tax enforcement to environmental protection to federal judicial performance.

Susan Long, a Syracuse statistician, and David Burnham, formally of the *Times*, have collected massive and evolving criminal, civil, and administrative enforcement statistics that tell stories about the full sweep of federal acronyms — FBI, INS, ATF, DEA, IRS — as well as statistical profiles of nearly every federal prosecutor and judge. They also maintain records on federal staffing and spending, both of which can be searched down to the county level going back more than twenty-five years. Some material and analysis is free on the site, but access to its detailed material ranges from \$50 to \$2,000, depending on the number of queries.

TRAC is part of a small group of organizations — including Investigative Reporters and Editors and The National Security Archive — that do FOIA work on behalf of the public and journalists and sometimes, as in the FBI case, on behalf of Congress. Senators Patrick J. Leahy, a Vermont Democrat, and Charles E. Grassley, a Republican from Iowa, have relied on TRAC. They called the FBI's decision to cut off data that TRAC analyzed "troubling." In a letter to Ashcroft, they wondered why information that had been publicly available for a decade was suddenly such a danger. The proper response, they wrote, is to "address the legitimate concerns about their enforcement priorities, not to blind Congress and the public."

TRAC has since sued Ashcroft to force the release of the terrorism data, adding to a continuing lawsuit that was filed against former Attorney General Janet Reno. A ruling is expected in the coming months.

— Michael Scherer

For more information, visit:

TRAC: [trac.syr.edu](http://trac.syr.edu) (free site) and [tracfed.syr.edu](http://tracfed.syr.edu) (subscription required).

## TECHNOLOGY CORNER

## CQ HOMELAND SECURITY

<http://homeland.cq.com>



The new Homeland Security Department — along with the \$100 billion industry it has spawned — is not just a Washington story, but also a local story across the country. And the best place for journalists to learn about it is *Congressional Quarterly's Homeland Security*, the only daily publication covering the topic. This one-stop shop for news, analysis, contacts, and resources is run by a team of four reporters and three editors.

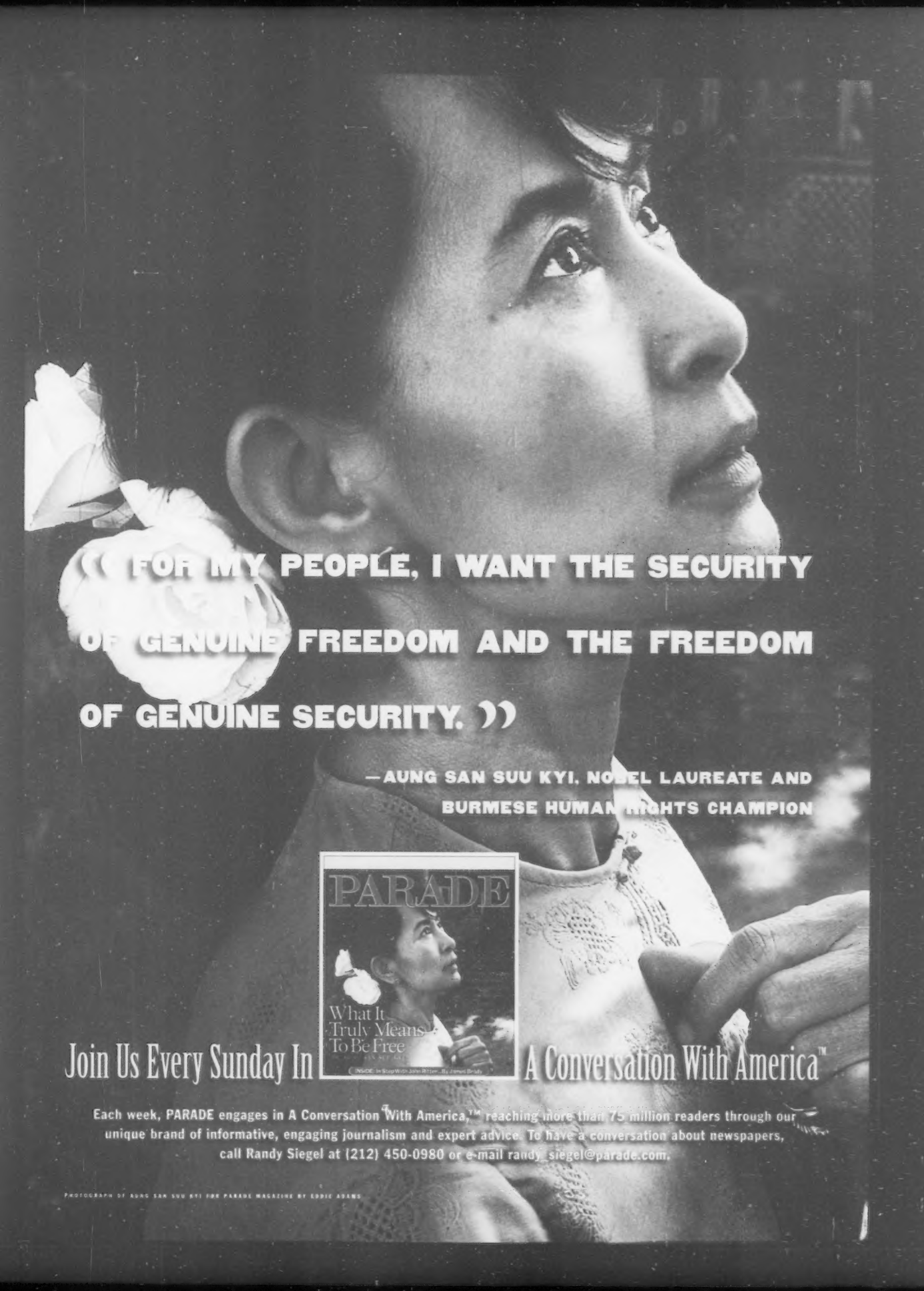
I don't often recommend sites that charge, but this is a worthy exception for those with the right budget. After a free four-week trial, the site charges \$1,250 a year for the daily mix of enterprise stories and alerts to homeland security developments. There is a \$2,500 level that provides updated government and private sources, as well as audio, video, and transcripts of hearings. Some media outlets qualify for a discounted price (contact Sean Doyle at [sdoyle@cq.com](mailto:sdoyle@cq.com) for more information).

Sreenath Sreenivasan ([sree@sree.net](mailto:sree@sree.net)), who teaches new media at Columbia, offers his tips for journalists at [SreeTips.com](http://SreeTips.com). More Tech Corner is on CJR's Web site, [www.cjr.org](http://www.cjr.org).

## SOUND BITE

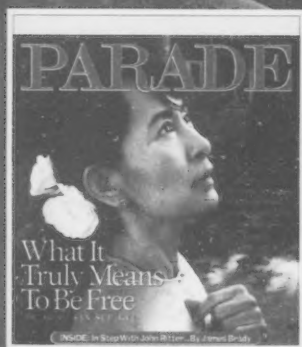
*"In an effort to slash costs and improve profits, Knight Ridder has cut staffing at its newspapers across the country, and the Herald is no exception. As a result, segments of our society go uncovered . . . Meanwhile, Knight Ridder's profits are up. The company's stock hovers around \$67 a share, just below its fifty-two-week high. And last week, The San Jose Mercury News, a fellow Knight Ridder newspaper, reported that corporate executives were granted \$10 million in bonuses . . . And for the fifty or so people inside the Herald newsroom Saturday covering the shuttle disaster, free pizza for lunch."*

— Jim DeFede, a columnist for *The Miami Herald*, in *The Miami Herald*, February 4



“FOR MY PEOPLE, I WANT THE SECURITY  
OF GENUINE FREEDOM AND THE FREEDOM  
OF GENUINE SECURITY.”

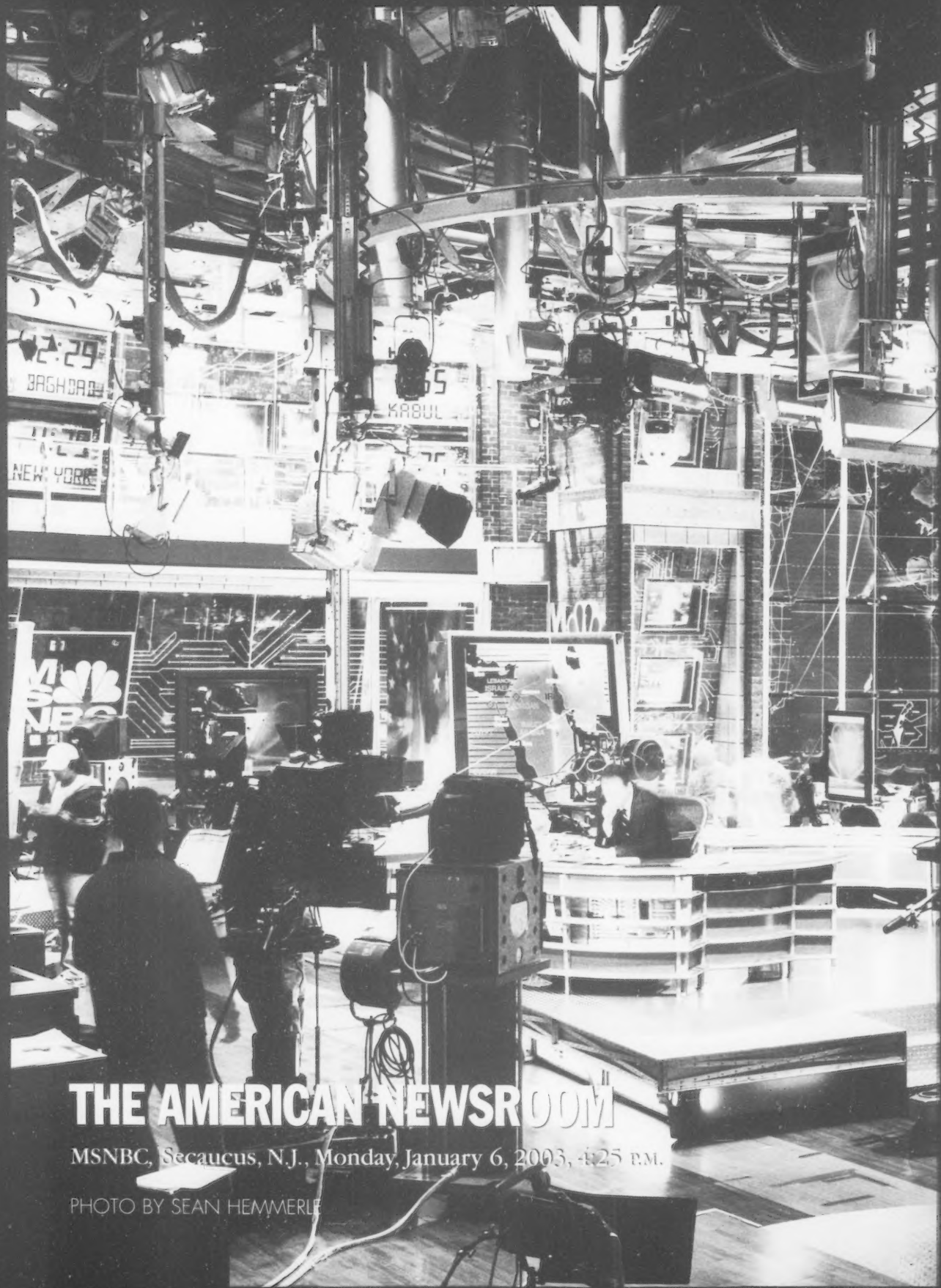
—AUNG SAN SUU KYI, NOBEL LAUREATE AND  
BURMESE HUMAN RIGHTS CHAMPION



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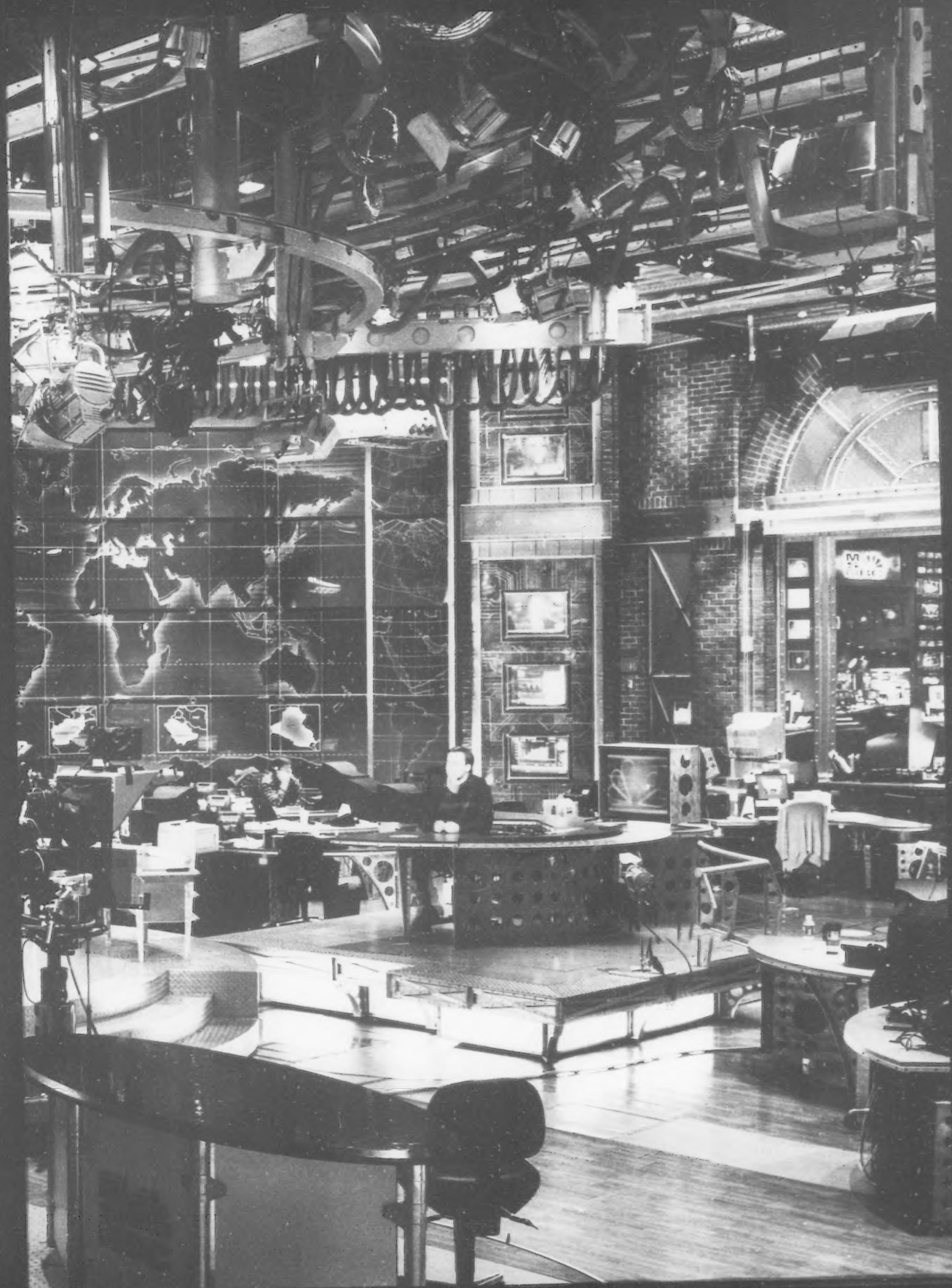
Each week, PARADE engages in A Conversation With America,™ reaching more than 75 million readers through our unique brand of informative, engaging journalism and expert advice. To have a conversation about newspapers, call Randy Siegel at (212) 450-0980 or e-mail [randy\\_siegel@parade.com](mailto:randy_siegel@parade.com).



# THE AMERICAN NEWSROOM

MSNBC, Secaucus, N.J., Monday, January 6, 2003, 4:25 P.M.

PHOTO BY SEAN HEMMERLE



# USEFUL SECRETS

*In a Run-Up to War, How Do We Report  
Intelligently on Intelligence?*

BY TED GUP

**E**arly in February, James Bamford, a veteran investigative reporter and expert on intelligence matters, got a call from a producer at one of the leading cable news programs. She wanted to know what he thought about the U.S. intelligence that had been offered in support of going to war with Iraq. In response, Bamford mentioned the Gulf of Tonkin, a reference to North Vietnam's alleged attack on a U.S. naval vessel in 1964. Evidence of that attack, presented as irrefutable at the time, turned out years later to be largely bogus, though the nearly 58,000 U.S. servicemen and women who died in Vietnam in the decade following the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution were real enough.

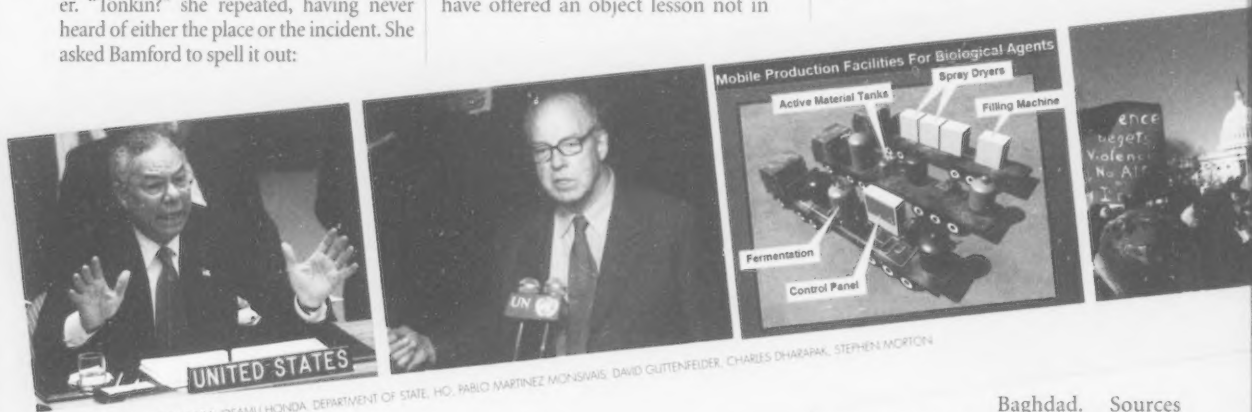
But the analogy was lost on the producer. "Tonkin?" she repeated, having never heard of either the place or the incident. She asked Bamford to spell it out:

this, Bamford is not alone. For months, the United States has pressed its case against Iraq, branding it part of the "axis of evil," accusing it of accumulating weapons of mass destruction, and linking it to al Qaeda. U.N. weapons inspectors wandered across an area the size of California, caught between the cat-and-mouse deceptions of Baghdad and the reluctance of Washington to share what it was touting as incontrovertible proof of that deception. Until Colin Powell's February 5 address to the Security Council, the evidence for Washington's claims remained cloaked in secrecy. The U.S. insisted it must protect its "sources and methods"—the Who and the How of intelligence.

Indeed, in an administration whose fixation on secrecy predates 9/11, the sanctity of "sources and methods" long trumped all else. But these past months have offered an object lesson not in

telligence, and the ultimate end to which intelligence is to be put is not merely the successful prosecution of war but the ability to demonstrate why war is necessary in the first place. That greater cause took a back seat this winter. And the irony seemed lost on officials who suggested that publicly producing specific intelligence might put sources at risk even as tens of thousands of American servicemen and women were moved steadily into harm's way, based on information to which they and the world were not privy.

The longer the United States persisted in hiding the particulars of its case and the more it relied on Rumsfeldian rhetoric, the warier some allies became. Public support for the war softened and suspicions grew that secrecy was hiding the administration's true objective—a regime change in



AP WIDEWORLD; ELISE AMENDOLA; OSAMU HONDA; DEPARTMENT OF STATE; HO; PABLO MARTINEZ MONSIVIS; DAVID GUTTENFEIDER; CHARLES DHARAPAK; STEPHEN MORTON

"T-O-N-K-I-N."

What unsettled him was not merely the producer's ignorance of the past but the uneasy feeling that today's so-called "hard intelligence" on Iraq might also one day be revealed to be suspect. In

the supremacy of secrecy, but rather in its limits. And they have offered a reminder of how critical it is that the press relentlessly challenge that supremacy and, as best it can, test the authenticity and credibility of those secrets that are revealed.

After all, "sources and methods" are only of value insofar as they produce in-

Baghdad. Sources and methods are indeed valuable, but they are not sacred, especially when balanced against national credibility or the lives of those willing to sacrifice all.

In newsrooms across the country, reporters debated how best to cover such complex issues as government secrecy, leaks of intelligence, and the formal release of classified materials, all of which seemed to bolster the administration's position

that it was necessary to confront Saddam Hussein. Even in relaxed times, the intelligence beat is one of the most difficult in which to develop independent sources. In times of crises, reliable sources often dry up or take cover. The beat naturally draws some of the most sophisticated and resourceful journalists, individuals who know how to navigate difficult waters and how to draw the fine distinctions upon which intelligence depends.

But sometimes the obvious eludes them. One of the most important services an intelligence reporter can and should perform for readers is to routinely provide them with a primer on intelligence. Specifically, readers need to understand — or be reminded — that intelligence is not a hard science but one that is riddled with nuance, that it requires interpretive skills, that it often produces contradictory or conflicting results, that it is not always immune to political pressures, and that, historically, its accuracy has been uneven. Context is everything; without it, stories about intelligence are misleading or outright unintelligible to many readers.

Then, too, news organizations, already stretched thin from foreign coverage and war preparations, must continually reinvest in their investigative re-

pendent confirmation of intelligence is no less valuable. It is equally clear that these same journalists must be able to withstand withering criticism, whether from the administration, be it Bush or Rumsfeld or Ashcroft, or from that portion of the public that is ready to savage any reporter who questions the party line.

History has rightly taught reporters to be skeptical about intelligence claims. More than a generation ago, secret intelligence suggested that political unrest in Cuba would produce armed support against Fidel Castro, an earlier object of regime change. That support never materialized, as the survivors of the Bay of Pigs remember too well. "I don't think the intelligence reports are all that hot," President John F. Kennedy is said to have remarked. "Some days I get more out of *The New York Times*."

One need not turn back forty years to find fallible intelligence. In August 1998, in retaliation for the terrorist bombings of two United States embassies in Africa, the U.S. launched cruise missiles against the al-Shifa pharmaceutical plant in the Sudan, convinced that it was producing chemical agents. Today,

specter of urban warfare. Not exactly comforting.

**R**eporters can and should point out that most analysts pride themselves on their independence and take grave offense at the mere suggestion that they are in any way influenced by political winds. But reporters should also point out that it is not within the ranks of the analysts that most of the shaping of information for political ends occurs.

Dana Priest, who covers the CIA for *The Washington Post*, says that while most intelligence may start out as objective, once it reaches the policymakers, its character tends to change. "The president," she says, "takes the information from the CIA and normally lets us know what suits his political agenda, unless he's outed some other way and can't help it."

The intelligence Powell offered the Security Council appeared to be firmest in documenting Saddam's deception and in raising legitimate questions as to the disposition of Iraq's forbidden biological and chemical weapons. Some in-



sources at home and abroad to determine if the intelligence offered is reliable. Reporters and editors should not be disdainful of modest or incremental advances in their stories; they should recognize that theirs and those of other news organizations may cumulatively offer readers vital insights and send a message to the administration and those who would use intelligence to manipulate public opinion that they, too, are accountable. And while the capacity to knock down an administration leak is relished, an inde-

few within the Central Intelligence Agency still support that conclusion, notwithstanding the fatalities left in its wake. In May 1999, for the Yugoslav air war, the CIA selected as a bombing target what it said was the Federal Directorate of Supply and Procurement in Belgrade. It turned out to be the Chinese Embassy.

It may also be remembered that in the first gulf war intelligence estimates hinted at heavy American casualties to come and spoke of Saddam's "elite" Republican Guard. Mercifully, such estimates were all wrong. This go-round, they apparently suggest an easier time of it, despite the

telligence reporters suspect that the U.S. stopped short of disclosing the whereabouts of specific stores of those agents to U.N. inspectors for fear that the Iraqis have spies among them and would be able to move the weapons before inspectors could find them. Instead, these reporters believe, Washington has decided to keep the weapons' whereabouts a secret and to take them out in the first stages of an air war against Iraq. To those reporters, it seemed, war was a foregone conclusion.

Even in Powell's presentation, the intelligence offered the public was nothing if not selective. Powell made much of finding a link between Saddam and al Qaeda. But in October the CIA Director, George

Tenet, suggested that Iraq did not pose an immediate threat to the United States and was unlikely to share its weapons with terrorists — unless provoked by an invasion. That assessment was conveniently left out of Powell's presentation — after which, Tenet seemed more in line with the administration. And now, even some CIA analysts who doubted a terrorist connection with Iraq appear to be on board with the administration. "Perhaps it's because they see the train heading out and George Tenet is on it," says Priest.

This tenuous link between Saddam and al Qaeda is the linchpin of the administration's argument for going to war with Iraq now, instead of later, after Saddam might have provided terrorists with weapons of mass destruction. The link is "clearly hyped," says Walter Pincus, who covers national security for *The Washington Post*. "The ties between Saddam and al Qaeda are not that clear. They spent over a year looking for that connection and this is the best they've been able to do. This is intelligence in support of a political point. They've created this cell in Baghdad that may or may not be there. You have to take their word for it."

What Colin Powell told the Security Council was meant as much for domestic ears as for the diplomats. His words changed few minds abroad. France, Germany, and China seemed as convinced as ever of the need to give inspectors more time. Iraq dismissed the charge of an al Qaeda connection as pure smoke. Britain's Tony Blair, America's staunchest ally, saw it as a smoking gun. But the American public was swayed, according to polls.

Whether it was the persuasiveness of the intelligence or Powell's own magnetism is less clear. What he served up in photos, audiotapes, and reports was a series of dots requiring some imagination to complete the picture. That is often the nature of intelligence. Its ambiguities require interpretation and invite mischief.

In the end, despite all the talk of sources and methods, it seems doubtful that Powell's disclosures damaged U.S. intelligence collection methods. Those who cover the intelligence beat are convinced that the photos were not of a resolution that would reveal anything of the nation's more sophisticated capabilities. The intelligence from eavesdropping on Iraqi officers focused on low-tech communications that were not even encrypted. Besides, Powell made it clear that he was not showing his full hand, hinting at still richer intelligence (an effective rhetorical device) and suggesting that truly sensitive elements remained well protected.

In making his case, Powell went out of his way to praise a British report. "I would call my colleagues' attention to the fine paper that the United Kingdom distributed yesterday, which describes in exquisite detail Iraqi deception activities," he said. Not long after, it was discovered that much of the report cited was not based on original intelligence but was cobbled together from various magazines and academic journals, some of it cribbed verbatim from a postgraduate student's research in California. Many reporters insist they are doing all they can to test U.S. intelligence, though

some concede that they have little real leverage. Even when reporters are able to challenge intelligence reports, their findings seem to fall on deaf ears. "There are only a few of us who care about the details," laments Pincus.

Other reporters, like James Bamford, disparage what they see as an uncritical acceptance of government leaks and pronouncements. A few even suspect that their peers mistake credulity for patriotism, or fear appearing disloyal in a time of crisis. E.B. White had something to say about that in 1939, on the eve of another crisis: "In a free country," he wrote, "it is the duty of a writer to pay no attention to duty."

Reporters must learn from the past, but which past? In the shorthand that passes from one generation to the next, place names become paradigms, ignored at our peril. For one generation, it is Tonkin, a reference to deceit, corrupted intelligence, and a pretext for war. For the generation before it, the Sudetenland chastens with a contrary lesson of history, one of appeasement, intentions horribly misread and provocations disregarded. The atlas is full of regret and recrimination. And now, Baghdad. That's "B-A-G-H-D-A-D." ■

*Ted Gup is the author of The Book of Honor: Secret Lives and Deaths of CIA Operatives, and is the Shirley Wormser professor of journalism at Case Western Reserve University. His most recent piece for CJR, "News in a Wartime Capital" (September/October), was about how the events of 9/11 have shaped Washington news coverage.*

## BAGHDAD JOURNAL

### Minding the Minders: You Report, They Decide

BY VIVIENNE WALT

"Vivienne!" shouts the minder from the Ministry of Information, a tall chain-smoker I've known for two years. He has cornered me on the cracked sidewalk outside the ministry's headquarters in downtown Baghdad. My heart sinks. "You've been in Iraq many times before," he says. "You know the rules. You went to church without a guide?"

There was no denying it. I'd stopped off to buy a bottle of whiskey, one of the few treats in this secular country. The Christian liquor-store owner suggested I come by his church later to see the latest sensation in Iraq, the ashes of Saint Therese of Lisieux, a young French woman from the nineteenth century whose remains had been hauled over to Baghdad in a box by a group of missionaries, to offer the beleaguered Iraqis some grace before the bombs begin to fall.

The invitation was too good to pass up. One is supposed to

have a government "guide," or minder, for such an outing, so on my way I stopped by the ministry building — a concrete rectangle downtown near the Tigris River — to ask for one. I didn't expect much luck. The country was flooded with television crews and print reporters, who crammed the ministry press center each morning for a kind of frenzied auction, hunting for any minder with a decent grasp of English. The best were snapped up quickly by the highest bidders, who were prepared to offer \$100 daily "tips" for being under continual surveillance. By late morning, the supply usually ran dry.

So it was this day. At sunset, I

nightly meetings — generally after nine — with senior officials in charge of visas. Crowds of reporters gather in a glass office inside the press center, waiting to plead their case for extensions or for new visa applications. "About half the time you're figuring out how to stay and watching the political winds at the ministry," says Ed Barnes, who visited Iraq in previous years as a *Time* correspondent and now works as a producer for FOX News. "You have to cut your work in half just to figure out what's



ORID, KEVORK DJANSEZIAN, INALHO, FRANCIS NORI, KEVORK DJANSEZIAN

walked into the incense-filled Chaldean Church in New Baghdad on my own and sat down to talk to the soft-spoken priest.

It was an act that would haunt me during the weeks ahead. I'd broken one of the cardinal rules: do not wander Baghdad without a government guide. I'd won a feature story, but I might have jeopardized something far more important: my next visa.

While Washington plotted a new gulf war, those of us entrusted to describe life in Iraq to the outside world were mostly obsessed with three things: how to get in, stay in, and get in again.

As I write this, I am waiting for my fourth Iraqi visa in six months. For me and some of my most seasoned colleagues, this incessant waiting has produced a state of almost continual nervous anxiety. The quest has followed us even on time off. Fresh from Baghdad last November, I headed for the Turkish coast on vacation — only to spend every night crouched over a cell phone, pleading with Iraqi officials to let me back in. My mind was full of questions during the dark, sleepless hours: Had I paid the right money to the right person? Had that person any reason to push for a visa? What if U.N. inspectors turned up a major weapons find — say, tomorrow? Two months later I repeated the cycle almost exactly. Out of Baghdad again, I spent much of a week's break in South Africa crawling out of bed at dawn to call Iraqi officials in Baghdad.

Not even when the cherished stamp is issued at an Iraqi embassy does the obsession end. Gone for the moment is the pressure to get into Iraq. But bigger pressures begin almost from the moment one arrives in Baghdad: the battle to stay longer than ten days, the designated limit set by the Iraqi press center at the Ministry of Information. This requires

going on with your visa. You can see people begin to fray the closer they get to the end of their visa."

There are other pressures, too. All foreigners are required to take an AIDS test if they are in Iraq more than ten days. Avoiding a weathered government-issue needle on one's exit from Saddam International Airport in Baghdad or at the land border to Jordan became another obsession. One U.S. correspondent finally paid \$500 to be exempted for six months from AIDS tests. "One day I'll show you the certificate," says the reporter, who didn't want to be named in *CJR*.

And then there are the watchers, who listen and report on what you say and do. Even for those of us who've covered several wars, Iraq's challenges have been unique. "This is by far the hardest story from a psychological point of view I've ever covered, and I've been in Somalia, Colombia, Haiti, and Israel," E.A. (Ernie) Torriero of the *Chicago Tribune* tells me over a drink in Amman in early February, where scores of us meet again to wait for new visas. "You know you're always being watched, by audio, in the hotel, by video. Every driver's reporting back on you. It makes every day a very long psychological strain."

In reality, little stops us from walking around Baghdad alone. Thousands of Iraqis in the capital speak better English than our minders. And the city of five million people has plenty to offer for the idly curious: art galleries, cafes, mosques. But the threat of being banned from returning to Iraq has been enough to stop most reporters from venturing out on their own. "The visa's the carrot," Torriero says. "Dangle a visa in front of a journalist, and they'll jump and ask how high."

It's natural to assume that such pressures inhibit the reporting. Whispering late at night in the passage of Baghdad's Al-Rasheed Hotel, reporters on breaks from their bugged rooms swap anxieties about the self-censorship they might fall into. One regular in the late-night passage talk for months was *The New York Times's* John F. Burns,

Tenet, suggested that Iraq did not pose an immediate threat to the United States and was unlikely to share its weapons with terrorists — unless provoked by an invasion. That assessment was conveniently left out of Powell's presentation — after which, Tenet seemed more in line with the administration. And now, even some CIA analysts who doubted a terrorist connection with Iraq appear to be on board with the administration. "Perhaps it's because they see the train heading out and George Tenet is on it," says Priest.

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Whether it was the persuasiveness of the intelligence or Powell's own magnetism is less clear. What he served up in photos, audiotapes, and reports was a series of dots requiring some imagination to complete the picture. That is often the nature of intelligence. Its ambiguities require interpretation and invite mischief.

In the end, despite all the talk of sources and methods, it seems doubtful that Powell's disclosures damaged U.S. intelligence collection methods. Those who cover the intelligence beat are convinced that the photos were not of a resolution that would reveal anything of the nation's more sophisticated capabilities. The intelligence from eavesdropping on Iraqi officers focused on low-tech communications that were not even encrypted. Besides, Powell made it clear that he was not showing his full hand, hinting at still richer intelligence (an effective rhetorical device) and suggesting that truly sensitive elements remained well protected.

In making his case, Powell went out of his way to praise a British report. "I would call my colleagues' attention to the fine paper that the United Kingdom distributed yesterday, which describes in exquisite detail Iraqi deception activities," he said. Not long after, it was discovered that much of the report cited was not based on original intelligence but was cobbled together from various magazines and academic journals, some of it cribbed verbatim from a postgraduate student's research in California. Many reporters insist they are doing all they can to test U.S. intelligence, though

some concede that they have little real leverage. Even when reporters are able to challenge intelligence reports, their findings seem to fall on deaf ears. "There are only a few of us who care about the details," laments Pincus.

Other reporters, like James Bamford, disparage what they see as an uncritical acceptance of government leaks and pronouncements. A few even suspect that their peers mistake credulity for patriotism, or fear appearing disloyal in a time of crisis. E.B. White had something to say about that in 1939, on the eve of another crisis: "In a free country," he wrote, "it is the duty of a writer to pay no attention to duty."

Reporters must learn from the past, but which past? In the shorthand that passes from one generation to the next, place names become paradigms, ignored at our peril. For one generation, it is Tonkin, a reference to deceit, corrupted intelligence, and a pretext for war. For the generation before it, the Sudetenland chastens with a contrary lesson of history, one of appeasement, intentions horribly misread and provocations disregarded. The atlas is full of regret and recrimination. And now, Baghdad. That's "B-A-G-H-D-A-D." ■

*Ted Gup is the author of The Book of Honor: Secret Lives and Deaths of CIA Operatives, and is the Shirley Wormser professor of journalism at Case Western Reserve University. His most recent piece for CJR, "News in a Wartime Capital" (September/October), was about how the events of 9/11 have shaped Washington news coverage.*

## BAGHDAD JOURNAL

*Minding the Minders: You Report, They Decide*

BY VIVIENNE WALT

"Vivienne!" shouts the minder from the Ministry of Information, a tall chain-smoker I've known for two years. He has cornered me on the cracked sidewalk outside the ministry's headquarters in downtown Baghdad. My heart sinks. "You've been in Iraq many times before," he says. "You know the rules. You went to church without a guide?"

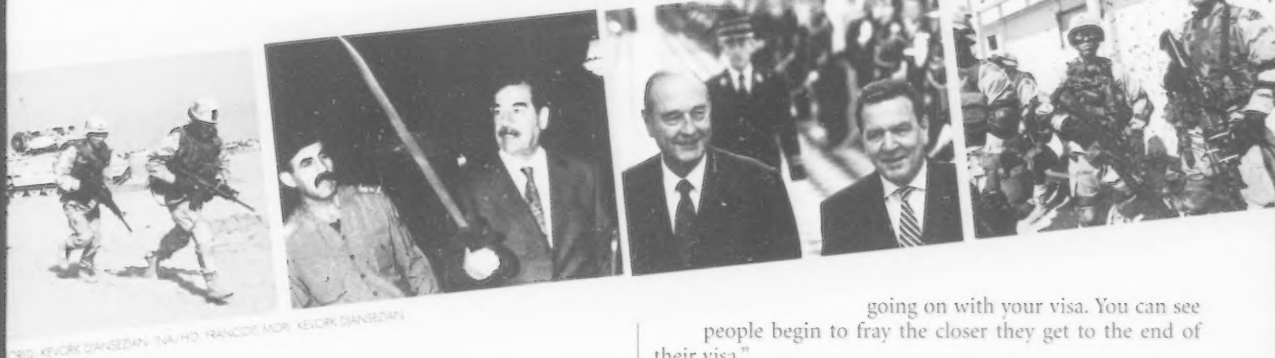
There was no denying it. I'd stopped off to buy a bottle of whiskey, one of the few treats in this secular country. The Christian liquor-store owner suggested I come by his church later to see the latest sensation in Iraq, the ashes of Saint Therese of Lisieux, a young French woman from the nineteenth century whose remains had been hauled over to Baghdad in a box by a group of missionaries, to offer the beleaguered Iraqis some grace before the bombs begin to fall.

The invitation was too good to pass up. One is supposed to

have a government "guide," or minder, for such an outing, so on my way I stopped by the ministry building — a concrete rectangle downtown near the Tigris River — to ask for one. I didn't expect much luck. The country was flooded with television crews and print reporters, who crammed the ministry press center each morning for a kind of frenzied auction, hunting for any minder with a decent grasp of English. The best were snapped up quickly by the highest bidders, who were prepared to offer \$100 daily "tips" for being under continual surveillance. By late morning, the supply usually ran dry.

So it was this day. At sunset, I

nightly meetings — generally after nine — with senior officials in charge of visas. Crowds of reporters gather in a glass office inside the press center, waiting to plead their case for extensions or for new visa applications. "About half the time you're figuring out how to stay and watching the political winds at the ministry," says Ed Barnes, who visited Iraq in previous years as a *Time* correspondent and now works as a producer for FOX News. "You have to cut your work in half just to figure out what's



ORIG: KEVORK DJANSEZIAN; IN: HO; FRANCIS MOR; KEVORK DJANSEZIAN

walked into the incense-filled Chaldean Church in New Baghdad on my own and sat down to talk to the soft-spoken priest.

It was an act that would haunt me during the weeks ahead. I'd broken one of the cardinal rules: do not wander Baghdad without a government guide. I'd won a feature story, but I might have jeopardized something far more important: my next visa.

While Washington plotted a new gulf war, those of us entrusted to describe life in Iraq to the outside world were mostly obsessed with three things: how to get in, stay in, and get in again.

As I write this, I am waiting for my fourth Iraqi visa in six months. For me and some of my most seasoned colleagues, this incessant waiting has produced a state of almost continual nervous anxiety. The quest has followed us even on time off. Fresh from Baghdad last November, I headed for the Turkish coast on vacation — only to spend every night crouched over a cell phone, pleading with Iraqi officials to let me back in. My mind was full of questions during the dark, sleepless hours: Had I paid the right money to the right person? Had that person any reason to push for a visa? What if U.N. inspectors turned up a major weapons find — say, tomorrow? Two months later I repeated the cycle almost exactly. Out of Baghdad again, I spent much of a week's break in South Africa crawling out of bed at dawn to call Iraqi officials in Baghdad.

Not even when the cherished stamp is issued at an Iraqi embassy does the obsession end. Gone for the moment is the pressure to get into Iraq. But bigger pressures begin almost from the moment one arrives in Baghdad: the battle to stay longer than ten days, the designated limit set by the Iraqi press center at the Ministry of Information. This requires

going on with your visa. You can see people begin to fray the closer they get to the end of their visa."

There are other pressures, too. All foreigners are required to take an AIDS test if they are in Iraq more than ten days. Avoiding a weathered government-issue needle on one's exit from Saddam International Airport in Baghdad or at the land border to Jordan became another obsession. One U.S. correspondent finally paid \$500 to be exempted for six months from AIDS tests. "One day I'll show you the certificate," says the reporter, who didn't want to be named in *CJR*.

And then there are the watchers, who listen and report on what you say and do. Even for those of us who've covered several wars, Iraq's challenges have been unique. "This is by far the hardest story from a psychological point of view I've ever covered, and I've been in Somalia, Colombia, Haiti, and Israel," E.A. (Ernie) Torriero of the *Chicago Tribune* tells me over a drink in Amman in early February, where scores of us meet again to wait for new visas. "You know you're always being watched, by audio, in the hotel, by video. Every driver's reporting back on you. It makes every day a very long psychological strain."

In reality, little stops us from walking around Baghdad alone. Thousands of Iraqis in the capital speak better English than our minders. And the city of five million people has plenty to offer for the idly curious: art galleries, cafes, mosques. But the threat of being banned from returning to Iraq has been enough to stop most reporters from venturing out on their own. "The visa's the carrot," Torriero says. "Dangle a visa in front of a journalist, and they'll jump and ask how high."

It's natural to assume that such pressures inhibit the reporting. Whispering late at night in the passage of Baghdad's Al-Rasheed Hotel, reporters on breaks from their bugged rooms swap anxieties about the self-censorship they might fall into. One regular in the late-night passage talk for months was *The New York Times's* John F. Burns,

whose stories from Baghdad rarely hid his intense distaste for Saddam's Iraq. In an October story about Saddam's decision to release tens of thousands of political prisoners and common criminals, for example, Burns wrote that the release "seemed only to have confirmed the worst that many Iraqis had feared about the system they have lived under for much of their lives."

The press minders, it should be noted, not only watch and listen, they read, particularly in English. They are adept at using Google, and constantly remind journalists that they know their work.

Burns's *Times* duties have included covering China during the Cultural Revolution and South Africa at the height of apartheid in the 1970s. By early February, he was holed up again for weeks in the Grand Hyatt Amman — Jordan's journalist holding pen — waiting for a new visa. Over tea, we whiled away the hours listening to a jazz trio and discussing the likelihood of Saddam's taking journalists as human shields. A few days later, Burns calls to say the word has come from Baghdad: he is no longer welcome to return.

So, had he made the right choice in failing to watch his words in his stories from Baghdad? He tells me he thought he had. Or, rather, at fifty-eight, he finally decided he had no choice. Still, the anxiety of not getting another visa had plagued him for weeks. "I would sit in the Al-Rasheed night after night, and have this thought again and again: 'Am I going to be excluded?'" he says. "Then I found myself writing into the night and I felt like the truth was sitting on my shoulder. Of course I'd love to be there. I'm demoralized

about being excluded now. But I knew all along this was possible."

Perhaps what had made Burns a target was his ability to occasionally cut through the Iraqis' wall of silence about their government. Among all our challenges, that was probably the biggest. When I covered South Africa during its repressive state of emergency in the late 1980s, many people were willing to tell me things that could have them jailed for years. Somali gun runners and Palestinian fighters have shared information with me at great risk to themselves. But in Iraq, those kinds of quotes were almost nonexistent. Burns says he tried instead to describe by deduction, by reporting what was missing from the official picture. "It's like having a negative photograph," he says.

So who told the authorities about my solo visit to the church? I finally settled on my driver, whom I'd hired at \$100 a day from the Al-Rasheed lobby. The small, gray-haired man had been nervous from the start, once insisting that he sit in with me on an interview with Swiss doctors from the Red Cross. The night of my scolding at the ministry, I anguished over what to do. The man's terror was clear, and all too human in Iraq, where the surveillance is relentless. Yet reporting Iraq demands at least a few moments of independent thought, if not action. I finally told the driver I would no longer need him. Faced with his disappointment, I slipped \$200 extra in the envelope, and bade him good luck during the trying months ahead. ■

Vivienne Walt is the Middle East correspondent for USA Today.

## BEING THERE

*Suddenly the Pentagon grants access to the action,  
but the devil's in the details*

BY ANDREW BUSHILL AND  
BRENT CUNNINGHAM

*"The idea of journalists allowing themselves to be taken under the wing of the United States military to me is very dangerous. I think journalists who agree to go with combat units effectively become hostages of the military."*

—Former CNN anchor Bernard Shaw

**A**re the pessimists right to worry? The ground rules that leaked from the Pentagon last month regarding reporters slated to be embedded with troops in Iraq — living and traveling with them —

seemed to validate Shaw and his fellow skeptics. Indeed, when (and if) the second gulf war comes, the roughly 500 embedded journalists will be prohibited (on paper at least) from:

- reporting about ongoing missions (unless cleared to do so by the on-site commander);
- reporting on the specific results of completed missions, or on future, postponed, or canceled missions;
- breaking embargoes imposed on stories for "operational security" reasons;
- reporting specific numbers of troops, aircraft, or ships below very large levels;
- traveling in their own vehicles.

Reporters must sign a document stating that, among other things, their embedding assignments can be terminated at any time and for any reason.

Much of this can reasonably be defended under the banner of ensuring the safety of the troops, but the rules are so broad they left some journalists wondering just what they will be able to report, and *when*. "Operational security is something about which reasonable people can disagree," says Kathryn Kross, the Washington bureau chief for CNN. "They must balance our need to be where the action is with the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

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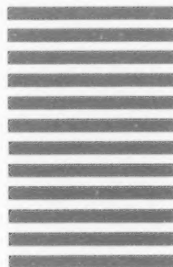
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
## THE THINGS THEY'LL CARRY

BY LIZ COX

**W**hile covering China's civil war from 1946 to 1949, Seymour Topping carried with him these ten items: a small Hermes typewriter, a rain poncho, a blanket, a 35mm camera, a flashlight, a knife, sulfa drugs ("there were no antibiotics"), pills for diarrhea, a sack of old Chinese Empire silver dollars, and a woolen hat that he would pull over his face at night to ward off the rats. He filed dispatches to the International News Service and later to the AP whenever he reached cities. "I typed them up and handed them in to the Chinese post office," says Topping, the Sanpaolo professor emeritus of international journalism at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism. "I never knew whether or not they would get out."

We asked to peek into the packs of several journalists who have reported from war zones in the recent past, and who are preparing for potential assignment in and around Iraq. Below is a head-to-toe accounting of what today's well-equipped print war correspondent carries (prices are approximate). Different reporters bring different things, of course, but the rough cost of gearing up could range from \$16,000 to \$35,000.

## HEAD

- 
- Gas mask, 2 @ \$150-\$250, e.g., nuclear, biological, chemical (NBC) mask with NATO threaded filter (compatible with any U.S. filter) and canteen.
- Combat helmet made of Kevlar® (ballistic fabric), \$200.
- Sun hat, e.g., Tilley Endurables, \$62, and ski cap for under helmet, \$8-\$20.
- Sunglasses, \$40-\$150. ("Not the mirrored kind because some indigenous tribes in the Middle East



think the mirrors allow you to see through women's burkas.")

- Neckerchief, \$5. ("Serves both as sweatband and head cover.")

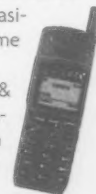
## BODY

- Chemical suit, 2 @ \$55 each, e.g., Respirix suit made of Tyvek® F material ("thin, crinkly, tough").
- Flak jacket, \$500-\$1,800. "Best protection for tactical situations" is Type IV with ceramic plates (stops AK-47 round) and neck-to-groin coverage.
- Money belt, \$10, containing \$10,000-\$15,000 cash in U.S. dollars and/or euro notes to cover one month's expenses (including lodging, meals, use of press center, driver, fixer, translator, and money for "getting out of emergencies").
- Heavy-duty internal frame backpack, \$350.



## COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT

- \* Satellite phone: Thuraya hand-held, \$800 ("Covers Middle East well." For "sending mainly text" at 9.6 kbps). Battery pack, \$50; travel charger, \$20; software plus one data cable, \$100; extra data cable, \$50 ("They break easily"). Connection time \$1.50/minute.
- OR: Inmarsat Thrane & Thrane Capsat® Messenger, \$8,600 with data cables and
- 



charger. ("For photographers," transmits text and photos at 64 kbps.) Connection time \$2.50-\$8.08/minute.

- Laptop computer, \$2,000, with duct tape over places sand can get into, stored in large Ziploc® bag to keep out dust. (IBM or Dell, because "there's nowhere to service Macs in the Middle East.") Car charger, \$25-\$75 ("So you can write during those eight-hour car rides through the desert"). Air cans to blow dust out of equipment, \$6 each. Laptop case, e.g., \$142 Pelican® plastic case.
- Triple-band GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) world phone, \$250-\$300 ("For day-to-day communications").
- Solar panels, 2 @ \$75-\$200 each, to charge computer and phone.
- Digital camera, \$190-\$1,000, e.g., Canon PowerShot \$230.
- Short-wave radio, e.g., Sony, \$100 ("To listen to BBC").
- Digital recorder, \$180-\$250, e.g., Olympus DM-1 ("You can send back an entire raw interview [by e-mail] if you're time-constrained").
- Worldwide adapter plugs, \$10 for set of five.
- Two flashlights, e.g. Maglite® \$15-\$30, and/or headlamps, \$10-\$40. ("Bring a red lens, because if you're in a tactical situation with troops, there might a light discipline and no white light will be permitted.")
- Nine-foot extension cord, \$6; 25-foot extension cord, \$12; power strip, \$10.

## MEDICAL/PERSONAL EQUIPMENT

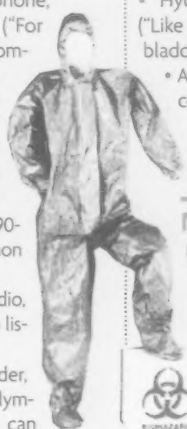
- First-aid kit, \$25 for basics to \$150 for expedition-style kit that "will do everything short of CPR."
- Ciprofloxacin ("Cipro"), \$5-\$7 per pill ("Can buy it over the

counter in Bahrain and maybe Kuwait").

- Atropine injection pens, \$10-\$15 each. Antidote for nerve agents ("Only if you have proper training on usage").
- Sunscreen, \$10; lip balm, \$1.50; bug repellent, \$5; shaving razor with extra blades, \$30 ("A beard interferes with your gas mask seal").

## CAMPING EQUIPMENT

- Three-season sleeping bag, \$200-\$400, with cotton insert, \$15.
- Ground pad, self-inflatable, \$40-\$75.
- Tent, \$100 for a two-person tent ("For one reporter plus gear").
- Hydration pack, \$30-\$100 ("Like a backpack with a 70 oz. bladder" for water).
- A Leatherman® tool, \$45-\$70, contains knives, scissors, etc.
- Mess kit, \$30.
- MREs (military "meals ready-to-eat"), \$5 each.



## MISCELLANEOUS

- Baby wipes, \$4. ("If you're with a frontline unit, it will be days before your first shower. These can be your shower in a can.")
- Syringes. ("Iraq

makes you take an AIDS test at the border. If you can't talk them out of it, you will want to use your own needle.")

- Music CDs and a book ("Lots of time sitting around, and you can trade it when you finish").
- Small alarm clock, \$25 ("For those 3 A.M. departures").
- L.L. Bean wrinkle-resistant travel blazer, \$179 ("for interviews").
- Woolite travel packets, 50 cents each ("Easier to rinse" than most detergents).
- Bluetooth technology for PDA, PC, and world phone. Permits wireless connections between devices.

*Liz Cox is an assistant editor at CJR.*

## THE ROAD TO WAR

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

needs of the military to operate undisturbed. It will be interesting."

**T**he Pentagon has called embedding a "historic" shift, and in its thirty-year cold war with the press over battlefield access the plan does seem to represent a new era in openness. By most accounts, the military gets credit for trying to mend the rift with the press that opened up in Vietnam. Pentagon officials and Washington bureau chiefs met twice, in October and January, to discuss how embedding will work. Nearly 300 news organizations have requested access, 20 percent of them foreign. (Not only will reporters from al-Jazeera be embedded with American troops, but reporters from Itar-Tass and China's Xinhua news

town; in Iraq they will be allowed to do so with the soldiers' consent. Also, the new ground rules state that the reporters' safety is not reason to exclude them from an operation, and that the standard for release of information is Why Not Release?, rather than Why Release?

The devil, though, on these and nearly all other battlefield eventualities, is in the details. The leaked document, which was first disclosed February 14 on *Editor & Publisher's* Web site (CJR later obtained its own copy), is intended as a guide for public affairs officers. Specific ground rules for each unit, according to Major Tim Blair, the military's media contact on embedding, will be established when reporters get to their units. "And those ground rules will change from mission to

press, Lewis says. "If you get a commander who understands and is sympathetic to the press's mission, it can work in your favor. There were a couple of those in Desert Storm."

Veteran military reporters say the gap between what the Pentagon puts down on paper and what actually happens in the field can be broad. Rules break down over time; enforcement can be uneven; people disobey. (Some reporters also note that embedding was a dish cooked up by the civilians in the Pentagon, and that such broad and restrictive-sounding ground rules were, at least in part, the spoonful of sugar that the military needed before it would swallow the idea of embedding.) "During Desert Storm, we worked so hard to get



AP WIDEWORLD; DAVID GLUTENFEIDER, HASAN SARBAKHSHIAN, HASAN SARBAKHSHIAN, LAURA RAUCH, KEVORK DJANSEZIAN, SCOTT APPELWHITE

agency will be with the soldiers, too.) The Pentagon is providing smallpox and anthrax vaccinations, as well as chem-bio gear, to all embedded reporters. And though reporters are to bring their own transmission equipment, the military has pledged to help them get the story out using its equipment if necessary.

The official rationale for the new policy is that the war in Afghanistan convinced the military brass that the best way to counter enemy propaganda about things like civilian casualties is to let credible reporters see for themselves. The new policy promises improvements over the situation in Afghanistan, where coverage of much of the conflict was severely restricted. For instance, in Afghanistan reporters were not allowed to identify soldiers by name and home-

mission and location to location," he says. The military's guiding principle on embedding is "security at the source," which essentially means that individual unit commanders will have considerable say over what reporters can and cannot do.

Charles L. Lewis, the Washington bureau chief for Hearst Newspapers, who was embedded as a pool reporter in the first gulf war, says that "security at the source" conjures the following conversation: "The local commander will say to the correspondent: 'You can come into our tent and look over our shoulder, and we will be very up front with you and show you what we are going to do. But in return for that access I need to look at your copy before you file. Now, if you don't want to do that, you can stand over there and when we have something that we want to tell you, we will.'" That system could work both for and against the

everything right on paper," says Lewis. "But on-site commanders have huge leeway to do what they want, and as long as the commanders are successful Washington is very deferential."

"Successful," of course, is a key word. Both unit commanders and their military and civilian superiors tend to be eager to have the press see and report on quick triumphs that involve few U.S. or civilian casualties. As in Vietnam, the military does not like bad news. The Pentagon document does specifically state, however, that "These ground rules recognize the right of the media to cover military operations and are in no way intended to prevent release of derogatory, embarrassing, negative, or uncomplimentary information."

Still, some of the more delicate media-military flashpoints are not specifically addressed in the Pentagon ground rules. What happens when the press witnesses civilian casualties? Or friendly fire incidents? Some Pentagon

officials insist that such information would be immediately available to the press — once it does not affect operational security. Others privately question that. (Battlefield casualties, meanwhile, can be reported as long as the soldiers' identities are protected for seventy-two hours or until their next of kin are notified, whichever comes first.) Bryan Whitman, the deputy assistant secretary of defense, says there will be no specific rule to govern such things as civilian deaths or friendly fire incidents. Once again, then, it seems the decision is up to the unit commander.

Reporters stuck with restrictive unit commanders are not without recourse, at least on paper. If a ruling on a story can't be resolved at the unit level,

the press. "With a little luck this could be the best-covered war in history," Christenson says. "Without that luck it could be something else entirely."

**M**ost in the press realize that part of the bargain for the access that embedding affords is that they cede a degree of control to the military. Nevertheless, embedding can be an important component of coverage. It may work best for the types of "soldier-in-the-sand" stories that Ernie Pyle wrote and Bill Mauldin drew during World War II. "Nine out of ten stories done by



then the office of the assistant secretary of defense for public affairs in Washington is the final authority. But a volatile commodity like news doesn't have a lengthy shelf life.

Even if the rules are tight, there is a certain advantage to simply being there. In Afghanistan, in part because much of the war was fought with secretive Special Operations forces, there were what one Pentagon reporter calls "black holes in history." With reporters embedded, the logic goes, even information that is censored from real-time reports may eventually get out — in the big-picture magazine and analysis pieces, as well as in the books and documentaries that will surely follow. "This is all going to come out," says Sig Christenson, a military reporter for *The San Antonio Express-News* and a founder of Military Reporters and Editors, a group formed in February 2002 to promote better access and more informed coverage of the military. "All these people who are saying they have to have every story right now are just going to have to grow up a bit. There is more at stake than just your reputation, and if you have to wait half a day to file it isn't the end of the world." The press, he says, must do its part to earn the military's trust, just as the military must earn the trust of

embedded reporters will be positive," predicts Christenson. "The people at the Pentagon know this. But unlike in Afghanistan, where the press coverage was severely limited, the American people will see our troops by and large doing their jobs under difficult circumstances and acquitting themselves as hard-working professionals." One producer at Fox News said, "Even if we never get a story out of an embed, you need someone there to watch the missiles fly and the planes taking off. It's great television."

But the consensus of the more than twenty bureau chiefs interviewed for this piece is that their idea of access is not the same as the Pentagon's. "There is no perfect world with embedding," says *The Washington Post's* Phil Bennett.

War can be chaotic and unpredictable, and reporters covering it need to be flexible. So for most news organizations, embedding will simply be another angle on the war, not the centerpiece of coverage. "We're going to have our people in as many places as possible, and hope that ten percent of them hit paydirt," says Mark Thompson, a Washington correspondent for *Time*. "Because there are going to be a lot of dry holes." ■

*Andrew Bushell is a free-lance writer who spent ten months covering the conflict in Afghanistan. Brent Cunningham is CJR's managing editor.*

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## THE ROAD TO WAR

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

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The official rationale for the new policy is that the war in Afghanistan convinced the military brass that the best way to counter enemy propaganda about things like civilian casualties is to let credible reporters see for themselves. The new policy promises improvements over the situation in Afghanistan, where coverage of much of the conflict was severely restricted. For instance, in Afghanistan reporters were not allowed to identify soldiers by name and home-

mission and location to location," he says. The military's guiding principle on embedding is "security at the source," which essentially means that individual unit commanders will have considerable say over what reporters can and cannot do.

Charles L. Lewis, the Washington bureau chief for Hearst Newspapers, who was embedded as a pool reporter in the first gulf war, says that "security at the source" conjures the following conversation: "The local commander will say to the correspondent: 'You can come into our tent and look over our shoulder, and we will be very up front with you and show you what we are going to do. But in return for that access I need to look at your copy before you file. Now, if you don't want to do that, you can stand over there and when we have something that we want to tell you, we will.'" That system could work both for and against the

everything right on paper," says Lewis. "But on-site commanders have huge leeway to do what they want, and as long as the commanders are successful Washington is very deferential."

"Successful," of course, is a key word. Both unit commanders and their military and civilian superiors tend to be eager to have the press see and report on quick triumphs that involve few U.S. or civilian casualties. As in Vietnam, the military does not like bad news. The Pentagon document does specifically state, however, that "These ground rules recognize the right of the media to cover military operations and are in no way intended to prevent release of derogatory, embarrassing, negative, or uncomplimentary information."

Still, some of the more delicate media-military flashpoints are not specifically addressed in the Pentagon ground rules. What happens when the press witnesses civilian casualties? Or friendly fire incidents? Some Pentagon

officials insist that such information would be immediately available to the press — once it does not affect operational security. Others privately question that. (Battlefield casualties, meanwhile, can be reported as long as the soldiers' identities are protected for seventy-two hours or until their next of kin are notified, whichever comes first.) Bryan Whitman, the deputy assistant secretary of defense, says there will be no specific rule to govern such things as civilian deaths or friendly fire incidents. Once again, then, it seems the decision is up to the unit commander.

Reporters stuck with restrictive unit commanders are not without recourse, at least on paper. If a ruling on a story can't be resolved at the unit level,

the press. "With a little luck this could be the best-covered war in history," Christenson says. "Without that luck it could be something else entirely."

**M**ost in the press realize that part of the bargain for the access that embedding affords is that they cede a degree of control to the military. Nevertheless, embedding can be an important component of coverage. It may work best for the types of "soldier-in-the-sand" stories that Ernie Pyle wrote and Bill Mauldin drew during World War II. "Nine out of ten stories done by



then the office of the assistant secretary of defense for public affairs in Washington is the final authority. But a volatile commodity like news doesn't have a lengthy shelf life.

Even if the rules are tight, there is a certain advantage to simply being there. In Afghanistan, in part because much of the war was fought with secretive Special Operations forces, there were what one Pentagon reporter calls "black holes in history." With reporters embedded, the logic goes, even information that is censored from real-time reports may eventually get out — in the big-picture magazine and analysis pieces, as well as in the books and documentaries that will surely follow. "This is all going to come out," says Sig Christenson, a military reporter for *The San Antonio Express-News* and a founder of Military Reporters and Editors, a group formed in February 2002 to promote better access and more informed coverage of the military. "All these people who are saying they have to have every story right now are just going to have to grow up a bit. There is more at stake than just your reputation, and if you have to wait half a day to file it isn't the end of the world." The press, he says, must do its part to earn the military's trust, just as the military must earn the trust of

embedded reporters will be positive," predicts Christenson. "The people at the Pentagon know this. But unlike in Afghanistan, where the press coverage was severely limited, the American people will see our troops by and large doing their jobs under difficult circumstances and acquitting themselves as hard-working professionals." One producer at Fox News said, "Even if we never get a story out of an embed, you need someone there to watch the missiles fly and the planes taking off. It's great television."

But the consensus of the more than twenty bureau chiefs interviewed for this piece is that their idea of access is not the same as the Pentagon's. "There is no perfect world with embedding," says *The Washington Post's* Phil Bennett.

War can be chaotic and unpredictable, and reporters covering it need to be flexible. So for most news organizations, embedding will simply be another angle on the war, not the centerpiece of coverage. "We're going to have our people in as many places as possible, and hope that ten percent of them hit paydirt," says Mark Thompson, a Washington correspondent for *Time*. "Because there are going to be a lot of dry holes." ■

*Andrew Bushell is a free-lance writer who spent ten months covering the conflict in Afghanistan. Brent Cunningham is CJR's managing editor.*

## Who

fought for a quality education for their children?

## Who

went to jail in order to ride the public buses?

## Who

changed the law to gain access to the vote?

## Who

has created more change in America than any other group in the last 2 decades?

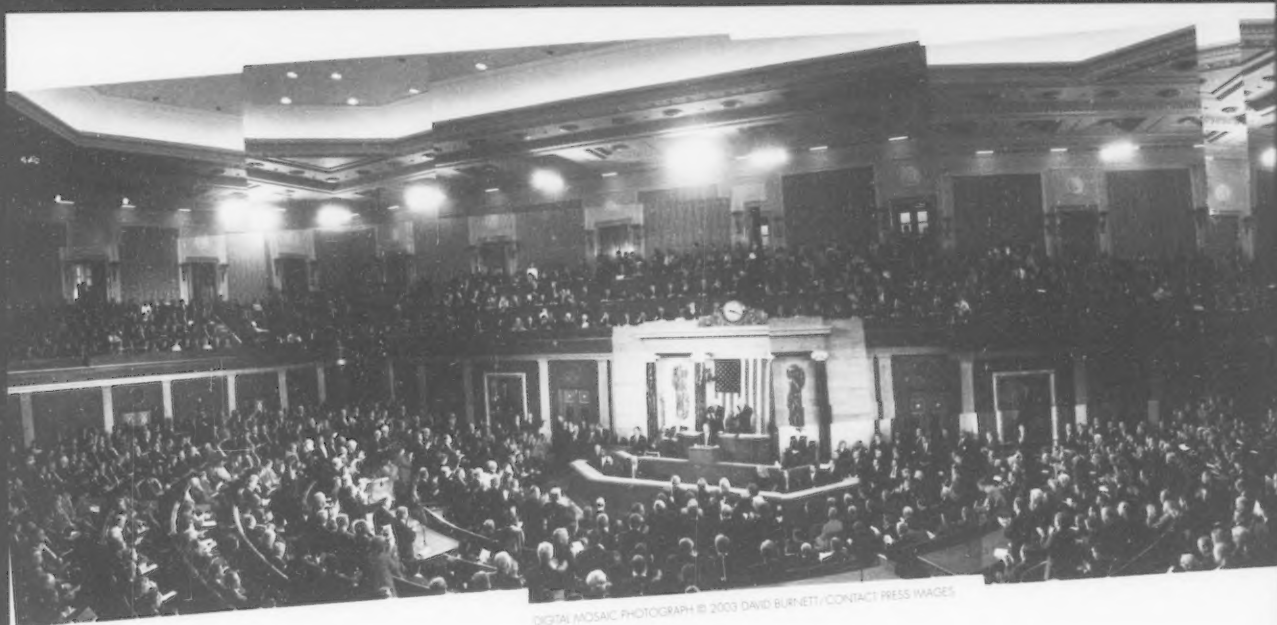
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# ANOTHER WAR: TAXES

It's a Fierce Conflict Whose Roots Go Back to Theodore Roosevelt. To Cover It Now, Journalists Must Deal with Inflated Numbers, Misleading Sound Bites, and Evasive Tactics

BY JIM TOEDTMAN

In January, the president of the United States turned to Joe Balsarotti of Clayton, Missouri, and asked him to stand up for the cameras. Joe and Jennifer Balsarotti are one of George W. Bush's tax families, the living, breathing examples of the benefits that would accrue to real people if his \$694-billion tax-cut plan is passed. Tax families have been a favorite prop for Bush, first when he was campaigning for the presidency and then after he took office.

Now, with the economy careering aimlessly, with stock holdings and retirement savings ravaged by a souring stock market, and with no quick recovery in sight, a new tax plan is being proposed, and the tax families are back. Joe Balsarotti, owner of the small Software-to-Go company, figures to cut his tax bill by \$2,600 this year alone if the plan goes through. Bush and the White

House have refined this small drama to high art.

This year's story, of course, is more complicated than Joe Balsarotti's 1040, and it is bigger than the shouts of class warfare and the charges of dishonest numbers and overoptimistic projections. The debate has been muffled somewhat by the war drums over Iraq, but the stakes are huge.

The Bush tax proposal is big enough and the public issues it raises are important enough that it deserves better than he-said, she-said coverage. The proposal has set off a classic philosophical tug-of-war over the proper role of government in a \$10 trillion economy. It reopens a historic debate that seemed settled nearly a century ago when angry populists pushed through the Sixteenth Amendment in 1913, establishing the essential progressive structure of the income tax as we know it today. The debate could have ramifications for decades to come, and it will almost certainly set the tone for the next election.

So the tax proposal and the crossfire it has ignited are particularly compelling, with their own set of challenges for the news media. How do we give this difficult story the coverage it deserves?

## HISTORY

*We've never had a bill aimed at the investor class before.*

— Grover Norquist,  
president of Americans for Tax Reform

Really? Tax debates start with the movement around the beginning of the twentieth century that forced adoption of the federal income tax in 1913, a populist crusade to make the wealthy pay a greater share of their income to their government. Ironically, a catalyst in that debate was Theodore Roosevelt, who became president when William McKinley was assassinated. One of Roosevelt's first acts as president in 1902 was to sign a bill repealing the estate tax, now popularly assailed as the "death tax." That measure had been



**FIRST SHOT:** In his State of the Union speech, President Bush asks for tax cuts of \$694 billion. His critics contend that his plan unfairly benefits the rich.

It puts attention on wealth and tax breaks for the wealthy in a way not seen since the 1970s' tax revolt and, before that, the days of Teddy Roosevelt. For the media, it's an opportunity to offer perspective and to assess the consequences of cutting taxes while the gap between rich and poor seems to be widening.

stalled in Congress but was quickly passed after McKinley's death. Norquist aside, that bill could more accurately be tagged the first one aimed at the investor class.

But before leaving the White House, Roosevelt had a conversion. He began assailing the "malefactors of great wealth," and urged a progressive tax system as a way to blunt the development of an aristocracy of the wealthy. "The man of great wealth owes a peculiar obligation to the state, because he derives special advantage from the mere existence of government," he wrote in his 1906 message to Congress. The rich should pay their "full and proper share of the burden of taxation," he continued, and urged Congress to enact first an inheritance tax and then a progressive income tax. Seven years later, a constitutional amendment was passed and ratified, and a new tax system was in place.

The battle was far from over; it's still being played out today. For example, Roosevelt's epiphany has become an inspiration for Bill Gates Sr., father of the Microsoft founder. Just as Andrew Carnegie did in the early part of the last century, Gates and a coterie of America's richest, including George Soros and Warren Buffett, have been speaking and lobbying members of Congress not to repeal the estate tax.

And for historians, there may be a sense of déjà vu in this year's debate over ending taxes on dividends and a new array of tax-sheltered savings plans, on top of the push to fully repeal the estate tax.

## THE NUMBERS

*Nothing should be taken at face value.*

— Robert Greenstein,  
executive director,  
Center on Budget and  
Policy Priorities

Especially numbers. The Bush tax measure consists of five major components: ending the income tax on dividend earnings; eliminating the penalty paid by some two-income married couples; accelerating the rate cuts enacted in the 2001 bill, but not yet in effect; raising from \$600 to \$1,000 the tax credit for each child originally phased in by the 2001 tax bill; and raising the tax exemption for capital spending by small businesses from \$25,000 to \$75,000. Democrats have their own ideas, namely some form of direct aid to financially strapped states, payroll tax cuts, and a freeze in some of the components of the 2001 tax act.

But it's the Bush plan that draws the sparks. Like any tax proposal, it is supported by pages of explanations, details, and computations. It was the subject of press briefings at the White House and the Treasury Department and supplemented by easy access to policy-makers and by fact sheets distributed almost daily for a week after the plan was unveiled. Business and special interest allies did the same. The critics matched the volume. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities held frequent teleconference calls and issued research papers. They were supplemented by comparable stud-

## A TAX TIMELINE

**JANUARY** The Launch. President George W. Bush outlines his tax cut proposal at public events, capped by his January 28 State of the Union address to Congress and the American people.

**FEBRUARY** Opening Blitz. The day after Bush sends the 2004 budget proposal to Congress, Treasury Secretary John Snow begins the public sales effort, testifying first to the House Ways and Means Committee and then the Senate Finance Committee, urging their quick action.

**APRIL** A Tax Day View. On April 15, with the public sensitized by the tax-return deadline, politicians and lobbyists begin to see the rough outlines of a tax bill. Congress hopes to enact a budget resolution by mid-April that would set the tentative targets for spending and taxes. By then, the House Ways and Means Committee and Senate Finance Committee will be cobbling their respective versions of a tax bill.

**MAY** Spring Cleaning. Sometime before Congress's Memorial Day vacation, the House expects to pass its version of the tax bill. The Senate hopes to follow suit, although parliamentary procedures in the Senate make it more difficult. Once both bodies act, Treasury Secretary Snow and White House negotiators will sit down with the House Ways and Means Committee chairman, Bill Thomas, and the Senate Finance Committee chairman, Charles Grassley, to begin the process of meshing the two bills into one. Two years ago, Congress passed the \$1.35 trillion tax cut on Memorial Day Saturday. But this time, it could get messy.

**AUGUST** Summer Doldrums. An Iraq war or signs of economic life could distract Congress and delay if not kill any sort of a tax cut, or at least reduce its scope. The far-reaching Balanced Budget Agreement of 1997, for example, was negotiated during the summer of that year, before the budget was agreed to in August. Ronald Reagan's 1981 tax cut and the 1993 tax increase were also passed in August. The 1986 tax-reform act was passed in October.

**OCTOBER** Overtime. The 2004 fiscal year begins Oct. 1. All spending and tax measures for the new year are supposed to be in place by then, but Congress has had trouble meeting deadlines. An extended war, an unexpected act of terrorism or a deeper economic collapse could force a broader White House-congressional negotiation, even a 1990-like summit (à la George H.W. Bush) for hammering out a final spending and tax package.

— J.T.

For a primer on tax terms, visit [www.cjr.org](http://www.cjr.org).

## *'As soon as you get to "double taxation," you've won the argument.'*

ies by the Brookings Institution and Urban Institute experts and analysis from Citizens for Tax Justice.

The more moving pieces a proposal includes, the greater the opportunity for skewing the charts, and the claims this year have been bewildering. They are almost certainly true and defensible; they are also in almost total conflict. And they underscore the importance of going beyond the claims to understand and present the intricacies of the proposals and the varieties of consequences.

Let's return to Joe and Jennifer Balsarotti, the tax family. The fact sheet assembled by the White House highlights three parts of the tax proposal that affect them. Together, they earn \$100,000, including the earnings of their software company, which he bought ten years ago. Both work and have comparable income, which means that easing the marriage penalty would save them approximately \$1,300. Accelerating the cuts in their income tax rates, which were scheduled to phase in over the next six years, would save them \$800. They would also save \$500 with the proposal to exempt dividend earnings from taxation. The White House estimates that their current \$16,900 tax bill would be cut by \$2,600.

But not all \$100,000 households can expect the same savings, and part of what reporters can do for readers and viewers is make that clear. For example, the accounting firm Deloitte & Touche, at the request of several media companies, has projected three different case studies of households with \$100,000. A household with a single taxpayer and one child saved \$717; a single taxpayer with no children, \$1,021; and a two-income couple with two children, \$2,242. The White House fact sheet also touts a \$1,100 reduction in taxes for a family of four with income of \$39,000. Three Deloitte & Touche examples for \$40,000 households show the three different impacts: a family with two children, savings of \$1,133; a family with one child, \$400; a single taxpayer, \$126.

The time frame also affects the debate. For example, the administration is pushing the bill as an economic stimulus, arguing that in the first year alone, tax cuts would total \$98 billion. Charts

produced by Kent Conrad, a Democratic senator from North Dakota, said the cut provided very little stimulus, closer to \$36 billion "this year." The difference is how you define a year: Conrad's figure is for spending in this fiscal year, which ends September 30. The administration is using a twelve-month calculation to reach its \$98 billion.

Reporters need to be wary, too, of the easy use of the word "average." Administration officials frequently point to the White House fact-sheet claim that "23 million small-business owners would receive tax cuts averaging \$2,042." Indeed, with the administration's definition of a small-business owner expanded to include investors as well as owners, the numbers look good. But the Urban-Brookings analysis found that 79 percent of taxpayers with small-business income would get less than the \$2,042 cut. Further, 52 percent would get less than \$500.

### THE RHETORIC

*It's all about sound bites, deluding the people, pandering to the lowest common denominator. I didn't adjust [in Washington] and I'm not going to start now.*

— Former Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill

O'Neill left Washington as the final details of the tax plan were being resolved. But his forecast of a blizzard of "sound bites" came true. Even before Bush announced details of the plan, Democrats labeled it the "Leave No Millionaire Behind Act." The tax-cut alliance turned "abolishing double taxation" into an applause line. Bush himself led the cheers on a series of campaign-style trips, at the White House, and during his State of the Union speech. "For America's 84 million investors, and those who will become investors, I propose eliminating the double taxation on stock dividends," he said.

But the 84 million is a stretch. Most of the 84 million own their stocks as part of tax-advantaged retirement plans, which would not benefit from the new exclusion. About 35 million households receive taxable dividend income, and most of that goes to the more affluent, prompting the charge by Democrats — and a few Republicans — that the proposal favors the wealthy. The president frequently claims that "92 million Americans will keep an

average of \$1,083 more of their own money." He's right, but there's that word again. The figure is inflated by including the much larger benefit for the wealthy. Analysis of 2000 tax data by the Urban Institute and Brookings Institution presents a different picture. They concluded that 80 percent of taxpayers would receive less than the \$1,083 tax cut, and roughly half would receive less than \$100. The top 1 percent, however, would receive an average cut of \$24,000.

But the call to abolish "double taxation" is being adopted by party loyalists and the army of grass-roots lobbyists mobilized in part by Grover Norquist and his Americans for Tax Reform. He has had success with catchy antitax slogans as the orchestrator of the lobbying effort to repeal the estate tax. He and the pollster Frank Luntz popularized "death tax" as the target, rather than "inheritance tax" or "wealth tax," as it's been known in earlier generations. More than 70 percent of the public opposes the "death tax," even though fewer than half of 1 percent of the estates would hit the 2009 threshold of \$3.5 million, the amount at which the tax must be paid.

Norquist and Luntz are working together again. "Every day across America, 10,000 stockbrokers and dealers are making twenty to a hundred phone calls selling stocks," says Norquist. "They are explaining the details of this tax cut. That's a million calls a day!" More important, he says, it's an easy sale; "As soon as you get to 'double taxation,' you've won the argument. You don't have to go any further."

Getting beyond the rhetoric can be difficult but also fruitful. David Cay Johnston, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for *The New York Times*, called the American Farm Bureau and other estate-tax critics on their claim that America's farming families were forced by an onerous tax burden to sell their farms. He talked to real estate experts and experts in agriculture economics, and no one could point to a single example.

### THE POLITICS

*A tax cut is always good politics. The question is whether it can also be good policy.*

— Senator John Breaux,  
Democrat of Louisiana

This tax bill is unique for its appeal to the growing audience of investors, who now account for more than half of the nation's households. They are part of an expanded universe of households where

stock prices and dividends are understood and where the tax bill is getting special attention. The bill's advocates use the "investor class" appeal to cast the measure in a more historical context. "At the end of the day, this will be remembered in the same way as the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts of 1964 and 1965," Norquist insists. "Those in favor say, 'I want to help you, investor.' And those opposed say, 'I don't like you, investor.'"

Critics reply that the universe of "investors" that the bill will affect is actually small and selective. First, the bill will have little impact on most investors, they point out, since their investments are held in the tax-free retirement plans. Second, as many as half of the corporations pay no dividends anyway.

And an increasing number of corporations that do pay dividends don't pay taxes, which mars the double-taxation rationale. CSX, the giant transportation conglomerate formerly run by Treasury Secretary John Snow, for example, paid no taxes in three of the last four years even though it had profits of \$934 million.

But Bush backers like Norquist say those arguments mask the Democrats' failure to develop alternative proposals that better address the concerns of the new investor class.

Not coincidentally, the Bush proposal is aimed directly at 2004. Even if the measure is approved this year, most taxpayers won't see any benefit until after they file their 2003 returns next April. "This is a jobs bill for two people — the president and the vice president," says Stan Collender, Washington vice president for Fleishman Hillard, a public affairs firm.

This is also an opportunity for the media to look beyond the numbers to the politics — in the alignment of interest groups; the local and national lobbying efforts already under way; and the new tools: e-mails, faxes, and door-to-door campaigning.

## THE BIG PICTURE

*We are looking for immediate changes in the code that will be good changes in the long haul.*

— Karl Rove, counselor to the president

In the eyes of the ideological allies of the administration, the Bush tax bill is a small step in the larger crusade to eventually replace the current, graduated income tax with either a consumption tax — a tax on spending rather than income

## Not coincidentally, the Bush plan is aimed directly at the 2004 election

— or a flat, single-rate income tax. As they see it, the tax code has simply gotten too big and unwieldy — 1.4 million words of law and 8 million words of regulations last year — and it is a burden on the economy. The new Bush proposal, on top of the \$1.35 trillion cuts enacted two years ago, adds to the momentum for comprehensive change. Further, they insist, it will unleash an era of economic growth that will close budget gaps and help meet the health and retirement needs of baby boomers.

Democrats and their partisan and ideological allies see only the red ink of the current budget deficits and the future costs to Social Security and Medicare, just as 77 million baby boomers start retiring in the next decade. They argue against dismantling the progressive structure envisioned by Theodore Roosevelt and dismiss the supply-side economics argument. They worry that the economy, instead, needs a quicker injection of stimulus, that the proposed tax cut takes away any chance of bolstering Social Security. "Digging the hole deeper before we start filling it is no way to go," said Senator Conrad, the North Dakota Democrat.

So the big picture for the administration is rosy, while the big picture for the administration's critics is grim.

The big picture for the news media is the opportunity to present the debate in a larger context.

The tax debate can be simplified by breaking the proposals down and examining their impact on individuals and segments of the community. Tax accountants and software specialists have tax programs by the dozens that help add precision. But the debate should also be seen in the larger context of the drive for a sea change in the way we tax Americans. Today, Norquist and his allies have abandoned a one-shot conversion. Instead, they've quietly outlined a five-step process. Ernest Christian, a lobbyist and former Treasury tax official from the Center for Strategic Tax Reform, and Gary Robbins, a visiting fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation, detailed the effort late last year:

"The 'Five Easy Pieces,' as they came to be called by many tax cognoscenti, are: a) lowering marginal rates (the rate

paid on the last dollar of income); b) eliminating double tax on corporate earnings; c) accelerating depreciation, ultimately to the point of 100 percent first-year expensing for business capital investment; d) expanding Roth IRA to all personal saving; and e) excluding export and foreign-trade income of American companies from tax in much the same way that other countries do in the world marketplace." With the 2001 tax bill, and this year's proposals to end taxes on dividend income and to consolidate and create new tax-free savings accounts, the administration has addressed three of the five pieces, and Christian and Robbins can say, "Stealth" tax reform is already under way."

The big picture also includes looking at what isn't part of the debate.

Corporate taxes, for example. Except for a relatively small provision for small business, there's no benefit for corporate America in the tax proposals. That raises this question: What is the future of corporate taxes, which used to account for more than a third of all tax revenue, but now, with creative accounting and expanding shelters, accounts for well under 10 percent? Tax havens and other shelters have been estimated to cost taxpayers upwards of \$60 billion a year; and the individual income tax now accounts for nearly 85 percent of federal revenue, the highest level since World War II. That's one more reason for public unrest.

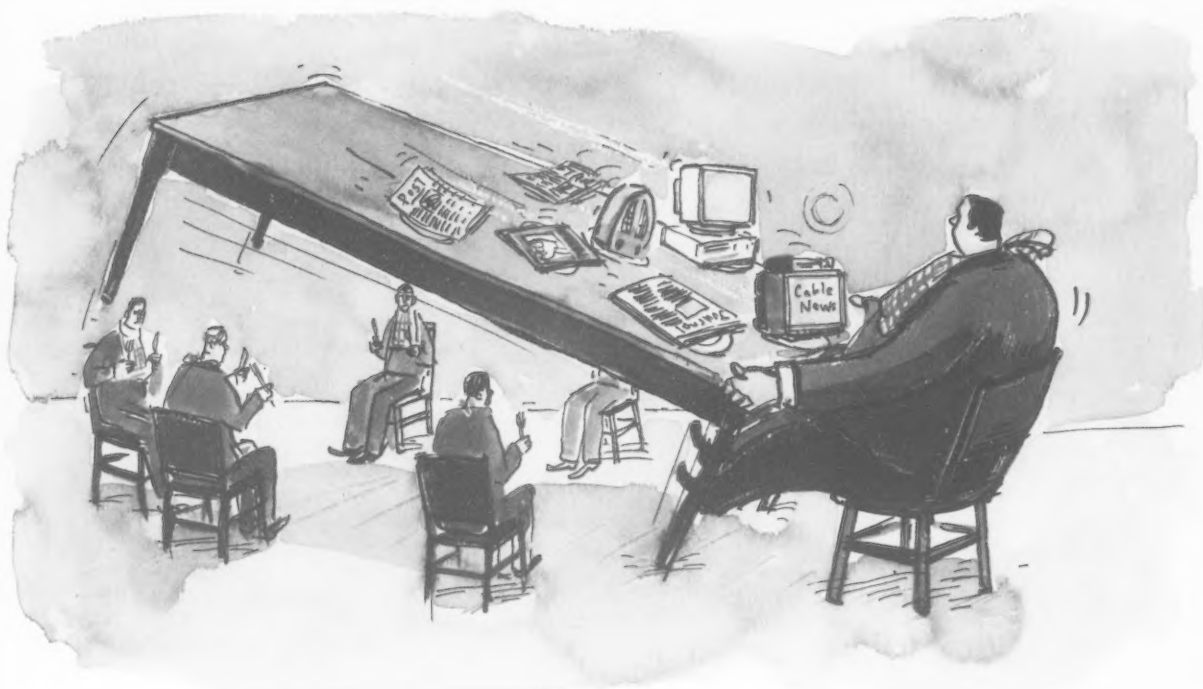
And what about the alternative minimum tax, which was expanded from corporations to individuals three decades ago? Because of tax credits and deductions, growing numbers of taxpayers are caught in the AMT net. In ten years an estimated forty million taxpayers will pay the AMT penalty. Correcting the imbalance will cost more than \$600 billion over a ten-year period. No one has an immediate solution.

"I don't know if this tax cut will turn your 101(k) into a 401(k). I don't have enough information," the acerbic morning radio host, Don Imus, mused recently. The immediate challenge for the press is making sure he can't say that again. ■

*Jim Toedtman is an associate editor and the chief economics correspondent for Newsday. He is based in Washington.*

# POWER SHIFT

*As the FCC prepares to alter the media map,  
battle lines are drawn*



GRAHAM FUNNELL/DAAGST REPS

BY NEIL HICKEY

Bringing the story up to date: The Federal Communications Commission whacked a hornet's nest with a stick on September 23, 2002, when it announced that it would take a hard look at all of its controversial rules on media ownership. On that day, Michael Powell, the commission's chairman, invited comments from the public about who can own what and how much in the media business. Instantly, the hornets began to swarm. By the deadline for submissions, February 3, oceans of legal briefs had poured in from unions, trade associations, consumer activists, think tanks, academicians: the Newspaper Association of America, National Association of Broadcasters, Newspaper Guild, National Organization for Women, Sony, American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, National PTA, American Psychological Association, National Association of Hispanic Journal-

ists, United Church of Christ, and roughly 13,000 other groups and individuals.

All of them pointed out, in differing ways, that the FCC was embarking on nothing less than the most massive reexamination of media ownership rules in the agency's history, and that the outcome could have the most profound effects on how Americans get their news and information. Many of them argued that loosening the rules (see page 27) would cause a far greater concentration of media power in the hands of fewer and fewer huge companies — even more concentration than already exists — and the withering away of competition and diversity of viewpoints. Powell said that he and his fellow commissioners would review all the comments and evidence and hand down the new rules in late spring. And so the battle was joined, growing louder through the fall and winter.

**A**nd the lines have been drawn. It is a strange battle, in a way, pitting journalists against their bosses, breaking up old alliances, and gathering momentum as the day of reckoning approaches.

In mid-January, Senator John McCain, the new chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, grilled all five FCC commissioners about the "monumental decisions" they were about to make that "will shape the future of communications forever." A Democratic senator, Byron Dorgan of North Dakota, called for more voices in the nation's media, but not from "one ventriloquist." A passionate, daylong seminar was held at Columbia's law school ("the most important meeting taking place anywhere in America today," Commissioner Michael Copps told the symposiasts). In late February, the FCC was to hold a hearing of its own in Richmond, Virginia, followed by two others (at the University of Washington and Duke) organized by Copps personally. Copps, a Democratic appointee, complained that the policy review was moving too fast, and that the issues should be ventilated far more publicly before any decisions were made. Powell sternly disagreed, saying that "you don't need a nineteenth century whistle-stop tour to hear from America."

Powell has regularly pointed out that reviewing the rules is no pet project of his own, but was mandated by the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (signed by President Clinton), requiring him to reexamine FCC regulations every two years and get rid of the dead wood. Also: that the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit has ordered the FCC to justify several of the rules or junk them.

Still, Powell's own view ("validate or eliminate" has been his cry) is that much ownership regulation no longer makes sense because it dates from the era when channels of information were scarce. Now, cable, the Internet, and direct-broadcast satellites are commonplace. His legal adviser, Susan Eid, puts it this way: "The chairman has long since advocated that, if you're going to do an honest evaluation of the rules, you have to look at the marketplace as it exists today, not how it looked thirty or forty years ago when we had black-and-white TV, no remote control, and three choices of TV programs." The presumption is on repeal of the rules, she says, unless hard evidence proves they serve the pub-

lic interest. Powell has been at pains to reassure his critics that he plans no scorched-earth policy that would lay waste all regulation. But defenders of the public interest — Consumers Union, Consumer Federation of America, the Center for Digital Democracy, and many others — fear that the FCC, with its GOP majority (three Republicans, two Democrats), will predictably facilitate Big Media's yen for the "efficiencies," the "synergies," and bottom-line values that come with gigantism. They fear those values will prevail at the expense of what's best for people who want to know what's going on in the world. Those advocates were not reassured in October when the FCC released twelve new elaborate studies of the media marketplace that, in total, suggested that media consolidation isn't such a bad idea. The consumerists countered that the studies were tainted and tilted, and that they telegraphed the commission's hidden intentions to favor Big Media at the expense of the public when the time comes to change the rules.

### **'AWFUL THINGS WILL HAPPEN'**

One of the most contentious of the FCC regulations forbids a single company to own a newspaper and a television station in the same community. The Newspaper Association of America, whose member papers account for almost 90 percent of U.S. daily circulation, is ferociously campaigning to exterminate that rule. The twenty-seven-year-old ban is so archaic that it should end "without further comment or analysis," says the NAA's brief, because a mountain of evidence proves that cross-ownership improves the quality and quantity of news and public affairs reporting without posing any real threat to competition and viewpoint diversity. John Sturm, president of the NAA, recalls that the cross-ownership rule was born in a different world a quarter century ago, and that "whatever it was designed to prevent or remedy is irrelevant now." He points to forty communities in the United States that have cross-ownerships (which existed before the rule, or got special waivers). No harm, he insists, has come to the public in those markets. "Our opponents' arguments are all theoretical — no data, just words. 'Awful things will happen,' they warned. Well guess what? Nothing awful has happened. What more evidence do we need? Case closed."

That doesn't satisfy Linda Foley, president of the 35,000-member Newspaper Guild, who fires from the opposite battlement: more cross-ownerships means jobs will be lost, and news consumers will receive a more homogenized diet of news and opinion. "The biggest impact is that we would have fewer and fewer people on the local level deciding what the news agenda is." The NAA-Guild difference of opinion dramatizes an unbridgeable chasm: the owners of newspapers generally want the ban lifted and the journalists who work for those papers generally don't. Reporters, columnists, and editorial writers — predictably — tend to think it's an unwise career move to publicly oppose their bosses' position on the matter, which may be why journalists have mostly failed to inform Americans about what's at stake here.

A few do speak out. At Knight Ridder's *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Henry Holcomb, a business writer, told CJR he worries about a corporate mentality that may try to "squeeze as many dollars as possible" out of a newspaper/TV combination and "blur all of the distinctive ways we try to stimulate and inform the public." Would TV people who acquired

### **WHO CAN OWN WHAT**

**These six FCC rules on ownership are up for review:**

1. Newspaper/Broadcast Cross-Ownership Prohibition. Bans common ownership of a newspaper and TV station in the same local market.
2. National Television Ownership rule. Bars a TV network from owning local stations that reach more than 35 percent of the national TV households.
3. Local TV Multiple Ownership rule. Bans common ownership of more than one of the top four TV stations in a market.
4. Radio/TV Ownership rule. Limits the number of TV and radio stations any one entity can own in a single market.
5. Local Radio Ownership. Limits the number of radio stations any one entity can own in a single market.
6. Dual Television Network rule. Bars merger among any of the top four TV networks.

a newspaper be respectful of what they don't know about newspapering, he wonders? Will they understand the subtleties of print culture?

One voice in the wilderness among newspaper proprietors is Frank Blethen, publisher of *The Seattle Times*, whose family has controlled the paper for generations. "Our opposition to cross-ownership runs against our own business interests," he says. Repeal of the rule would substantially increase the value of the *Times*. "It would eliminate a competitor and give us more control over the marketplace. If that's all we cared about, we'd be for it."

But he's sure that these clusters don't produce good journalism. "The Blethen family could benefit financially from repeal of cross-ownership," he says, "but I guarantee you that the citizens of Seattle would not benefit from it." Large newspaper chains and TV station groups covet these combinations out of self-interest, not the public interest, he says, because owning lots of media in one market lets you control advertising rates. "It's the public company mentality, that

you have to keep getting bigger as the only way to drive earnings, stock prices, and the CEO's stock options." Editors of chain-owned newspapers are mostly silent about cross-ownership, Blethen says. "We're creating a whole generation of publishers and editors who don't have the independence to speak out on these issues on behalf of the public."

## NEW SOURCES OF NEWS?

As long ago as 1978, the Supreme Court in *FCC v National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting*, wrote: "It is unrealistic to expect true diversity from a commonly owned station-newspaper combination. The divergence of their viewpoints cannot be expected to be the same as if they were antagonistically run." Defenders of the rule offer evidence that newspapers and television stations are by far the most popular sources of news and thus ought not be melded into one voice. But backers of deregulation are fond of pointing out that the Internet, cable, and direct broadcast satellites offer an array of

choices that didn't exist a few decades ago, so no great damage is done by losing a journalistic voice or two in a community. Hold on, says the opposition: virtually all of the major Internet sites that people use for news are owned by Big Media; the editorial content is indistinguishable from what those broadcasters and newspapers put out (see "Top 20" below). Moreover, they point out, most Internet users go to the Web for national and international news, not local. And besides that, the Internet is not a mass medium, no matter what you may have heard: little more than half of U.S. households have Internet connections, and among minorities and poor people, the figure is a lot lower.

On the cable side, concentration is already apparent: two owners, Comcast and AOL Time Warner, serve 40 percent of cable households. All of the cable news networks — CNN, CNN Headline News, Fox, MSNBC, CNBC, CNNfn — are owned by three conglomerates: AOL Time Warner, GE, and News Corporation. Direct broadcast satellites? Two companies control virtually the entire industry, and recently, one of them (EchoStar) tried unsuccessfully to buy the other (DirecTV). Thus, most sources of news are tapped from the same old barrels.

## 'MORE VOICES, NOT FEWER'

Are TV networks too big for their boots? TV stations think so. The 1996 Telecom Act lets media companies like Viacom, GE, Disney, and News Corp. — which own, respectively, CBS, NBC, ABC, and Fox — accumulate stations to their heart's content, as long they reach no more than 35 percent of U.S. households. The networks have lobbied furiously to own more stations because many of those local outlets have huge profit margins of 40 percent or more (networks make far less), and because owning them would give the networks more power than they already have over what gets on the air nationally. To bolster their push to lift the ownership caps, networks claim that their owned-and-operated stations produce better local newscasts than independent stations do. No they don't, insist the indies. At the moment, CBS owns twenty-one stations; ABC, ten; NBC, thirteen; and Fox, thirty-three. Most other commercial stations have affiliate contracts with a network, but are owned by com-

## THE TOP 20 INTERNET NEWS SITES

Rank	News Source	Owner	Unique Audience (000)	Time Per Person (hh:mm:ss)
1	MSNBC.com	NBC/Microsoft	15,503	0:21:58
2	AOL News	AOL Time Warner	15,174	0:22:49
3	CNN.com	AOL Time Warner	15,168	0:30:00
4	Yahoo! News	Yahoo	14,818	0:19:45
5	ABC News	Disney	7,658	0:10:13
6	NYTimes.com	New York Times	7,192	0:37:17
7	Gannett Newspapers and Newspaper Division	Gannett	7,124 *	0:15:52
8	Internet Broadcasting Systems Inc.	IBS	5,802	0:14:11
9	Washingtonpost.com	Washington Post/Newsweek	5,135	0:19:08
10	USATODAY.com	Gannett	4,989	0:23:28
11	Hearst Newspapers Digital	Hearst	4,386 *	0:15:24
12	CBS News	Viacom	3,576	0:09:00
13	Time Magazine	AOL Time Warner	3,445	0:06:26
14	McClatchy Newspapers	McClatchy	3,383 *	0:16:47
15	MSN Slate	Microsoft	3,359	0:11:17
16	WorldNow	WorldNow	3,033 **	0:08:32
17	Fox News	News Corporation	2,631	0:36:58
18	The Boston Globe	New York Times Company	2,378	0:23:41
19	Los Angeles Times	Tribune Company	2,245	0:15:44
20	New York Post	News Corporation	2,072	0:12:49

Figures are for December 2002. Source: Nielsen/Net Ratings \*Total unique visitors for all local papers in the chain. \*\* Creates sites and sells online ads for TV stations.

panies like A.H. Belo, Hearst-Argyle, Cox, and Post-Newsweek. Station groups like those think the TV networks already have too much influence, and believe that letting them gobble up more TV stations will give them a stranglehold on programming — news, public affairs, and entertainment.

The dispute has driven a wedge between the National Association of Broadcasters (whose board of directors is dominated by independent station owners) and the big TV networks, causing CBS, NBC, and Fox to quit the NAB in a huff. Dennis Wharton, an NAB vice-president, says: "We think the thirty-five-percent cap has been good for localism." An influential group called the Network Affiliated Stations Alliance, which represents 600 stations, agrees. Its chairman, Alan Frank, the president of Post-Newsweek's station group, tells *CJR*: "We feel it's important for democracy that we have more voices, not fewer. Further consolidation is not good for the country. Our system of broadcasting is set up very clearly as being locally based. That's its strength."

The affiliated stations argue that independent stations are far more able than network-owned stations to preempt the network's prime-time programs when a major news story of local importance breaks. Still, networks often use sanctions built into affiliate contracts to muscle stations into running the network's menu of entertainment shows instead of local news coverage.

In September 2002, CBS strong-armed a Florida affiliate into airing the season premiere of *48 Hours* instead of an important gubernatorial debate. NBC, during the 2000 political campaign, pressured its affiliates to run a baseball playoff game instead of a presidential debate. (Some refused.) ABC's affiliate in Dallas, home of American Airlines, had to fight the network for a few minutes of airtime during *Monday Night Football* halftime to present local news updates on the November 12, 2001, crash of an American Airlines jet. But the simple truth is that stations rarely preempt the network for local coverage lest they enrage viewers devoted to *Survivor*, *The Bachelorette*, and *Joe Millionaire*.

As with most of the ownership rules, the underlying debate is less about principle than about whose financial ox would be gored if the 35 percent cap were eliminated or eased. Affiliates (but

## RADIO DAZE THE CANARY DIED

Consumer advocates say this: Anybody who thinks media consolidation is good for the country should take a look at what happened to radio after its ownership rules were relaxed in 1996. Radio was the "canary in the mine," as FCC commissioner Jonathan Adelstein puts it. Radio was deregulated and the canary died. In 1996 and 1997, 4,407 of the nation's 11,000 commercial radio stations changed hands. Even Chairman Michael Powell has declared himself "troubled" by the egregious radio concentration.

Two companies, Clear Channel Communications, Inc. and Viacom, now attract 42 percent of radio listeners and industry revenue. L. Lowry Mays, the San Antonio-based billionaire founder of Clear Channel, owned thirty-six stations before deregulation and now has 1,225 in fifty states. In a decade, the company's revenue has gone from \$74 million to about \$8 billion. In its search for efficiencies, Clear Channel has perfected what's called "voice tracking," a deceptive technique in which centrally produced programming — containing local allusions — is beamed to the company's stations, letting listeners believe that the content is all locally originated. "It's cookie-cutter cacophony from corporate masters a continent away," says William O'Shaughnessy, president of Whitney Radio, a two-station group in Westchester County, New York. He regrets that so many local and regional radio stations — which formerly covered the news of their communities — have sold out to the chains. In the end, he says, "greed may finish us all."

Local news is, in fact, one of the saddest casualties of deregulation. In 1982, 98 percent of U.S. radio stations had news operations. Now only 67 percent do, and half of the 12,000 radio news staffers are part-timers. Radio news directors are an endangered species. For such reasons, Senator Russell D. Feingold, Democrat of Wisconsin, announced in January that he'll introduce legislation to limit further consolidation of the radio industry.

— N.H.

not network-owned stations), collectively, haul in tens of millions of dollars every year for renting their airtime to the networks. That so-called "compensation" is found money for the affiliates and goes straight to the bottom line. They don't want to lose it. Networks, on the other hand, say they can't afford to pay it any longer and have made it no secret that they want to stop. Thus, the more stations a network can own outright, the more it can improve its revenue stream, eliminate compensation, and obviate those pesky preemptions that undermine audience ratings and advertising income. Hostile guns from many quarters are bearing on the 35 percent rule; however, the smart money is betting that the FCC will hedge its bet and raise the limit to 40 percent or 50 percent rather than discard it altogether.

## 'HOW DARE YOU?'

Among the other ownership rules, public advocates are especially averse to the notion of one company owning two television stations in the same community (so-called duopolies) and to letting any of the Big Four TV networks — CBS, ABC, NBC, Fox — buy out one of the others.

In 1999, the FCC relaxed its rules to allow common ownership of two TV stations in the same market as long as one of them isn't among the community's four leading stations, and eight others remain. About seventy-five such duopolies exist. For journalists, that often means combining news staffs and resources, reducing the richness of a community's news diet. In Los Angeles, for example, CBS's two stations share a news director, and so do Fox's. In New York, Fox's two stations will soon be under one roof. (Since 1995, the number of entities owning commercial TV stations has dropped 40 percent.)

The NAB argues that the FCC ought to okay these media marriages because some small TV stations are losing money, and if they go out of business, the community will lose one newsroom covering the local scene. In a new tack, the NAB recently upped the ante and began campaigning for triopolies in areas where stations are on shaky financial ground. (Viacom's president, Mel Karmazin, told a media conference in December: "How dare they say you can have only two stations in a market?")

At the national level, far more conspicuous consequences for news would

result if, let us say, CBS took over NBC. (Viacom, CBS's parent, once expressed such an interest.) That can't happen now, but if the rule is altered, two news divisions inevitably would become one, giving viewers less choice in hearing about wars, elections, national policy, and the Washington ballyhoo. (Meanwhile, Dan Rather and Tom Brokaw would suffer the indignity of sharing the anchor chores.)

In April 2002, NBC acquired Telemundo, the Spanish-language network, and promptly merged the two networks' newsrooms in Miami. The assumption, says Herta Suarez, AFTRA's national director of special projects, is that NBC will do the same in cities such as Los Angeles and Chicago, where both

networks have news operations. "This will reduce opportunities for journalists to work," she says, "and also what the public will learn." (Suarez also laments that NBC pays Latino staffers less than Anglos for the same work.) Juan Gonzalez, president of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, says that the goal of giving Americans a diversity of opinions and analyses "has been virtually forgotten."

## A 'TRAGIC MISTAKE?'

At the Columbia law school forum in January, chairman Powell confessed he is no fan of Congress's mandate that he review media ownership rules every two years. It's "regrettable and destabilizing"

he said, to go through this torturous process so often. He added: "There will be rules when this is done [but] there won't be a rule that lets one person own everything."

That *reductio ad absurdum* was marginally reassuring to his opponents, but they hoped he would remain tightly focused on the crucial underlying principle: that the whole point of devising public policy is to do what's best for the people, not to guarantee corporations their desired "efficiencies" and "synergies," which is none of the FCC's business.

As USC's filing to the commission put it, the agency's mandate to regulate is driven by the First Amendment rights of the public, not the media owners. Safeguard-

## Q&A FCC COMMISSIONER MICHAEL COPPS: WE'RE HEADING INTO THE UNKNOWN



*FCC Commissioner Michael J. Copps, sixty-two, has been a sort of Cassandra of media regulation for some time, warning of the dire consequences of unleashed concentration. He has been a commissioner since May 2001, one of two Democratic appointees, along with Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein, and three Republicans, Kevin Martin, Kathleen Abernathy, and the chairman, Michael Powell. Copps spoke with Alicia Mundy. Here are excerpts.*

*What do you think will happen to America's main news outlets if the ban on broadcast TV station and newspaper cross-ownership is removed or significantly weakened by the FCC?*

I don't think we know. And that's the reason why I am so disappointed to see us rushing toward voting on these issues, when we don't know what the results of our actions are going to be in either the intended consequences or the unintended consequences that always seem to accompany large policy decisions.

*You've called for more public hearings on media ownership — yet Chairman Powell is opposed to more hearings.*

I think we really need to do more intensive investigation. We need to get out into some of these markets, get the feel of them, and draw on new experts out there — call on stakeholders who don't normally participate in rulemakings here at the Federal Communications Commission.

Let's go where some of these combinations [of newspaper and broadcast station ownership by the same company] have been grandfathered and see how they're working. Let's find out if they work similarly in large-size markets, medium-size markets, smaller-size markets. Let's get a grip on the situation.

We're talking about two types of media here that are really the lifeblood of our democracy, newspapers and broadcast. Let's set up some scenarios and play them out and see what they look like. Go out and find out what's actually happened.

*Then let's vote.*

*What other effects of deregulation should the FCC look at?*

I think we need to be looking much more intently at how consolidation issues af-

fect minorities and contribute to the objective of diversity — diversity of programming, diversity of ownership, diversity of opportunities.

I think we need to be looking much more closely at the implications for advertisers in a consolidated environment. Are we freezing out small mom and pop stores from being able to advertise if cable rates are going up?

But there are other people in the population and other groups in the population and I think advertisers are increasingly concerned that maybe they're not reaching them.

We haven't looked at consolidation in the context of digital television and the new technologies. The fact that a local station will be able to multicast five or six different channels—how does that affect the competitive environment in a local market?

So not only do I not think that we have answered all the questions, I don't think we have asked all the questions.

*The appeals court has smacked the FCC several times in the last two years, demanding that the agency show why there's a need for any ownership caps at all, and asking for quantitative evidence to support ownership limits. How can public hearings, with average consumers*

ing those rights has "been understood to permit restricting the media industry's natural desire to concentrate ownership in order to achieve economies of scale." Sandra Ortiz, author of the USC brief and executive director of the university's communications law center, says that the once-revered concept of local media ownership has become "so rare as to be almost quaint."

The Newspaper Guild's comments to the commission are equally unambiguous: "Media owners claim that relaxation of ownership rules will allow them to realize 'synergies.' [But] the commission's charge is to protect and enhance media diversity, competition, and local identity — not efficiency." AFTRA points out that media conglomerates, in

hot pursuit of higher profits, customarily put heavy pressure on their newspapers and broadcast stations to cut costs, with negative consequences on the journalism. Once upon a time, says the union, broadcast stations competed for audience by doing the best possible local news. But media companies that dominate a market have little incentive to spend money on enterprisers and investigations. Depriving people of that "is to enter onto a slippery slope that will leave the public wondering whose 'truth' is being told."

Allowing further media concentration would be a "tragic mistake," says the veteran editor Gene Roberts, now a journalism professor at the University of Maryland. "Communities deserve to be

looked at with different eyes. Even with the best integrity and most solid news principles in the world, what looks like a story to one person may not to another." Easing the rules, says Roberts, is "just going to make an already bad situation even worse. There's very little news competition in most parts of the country, and we're about to have even less."

That's how it looks now, anyway. Five unelected appointees, whom most Americans have never heard of, will make those decisions in the next few months. If they get it right this time, the hornets won't swarm quite so furiously two years from now when the rules come up for review all over again. ■

Neil Hickey is CJR's editor at large.

*testifying, help the FCC develop serious evidence for the court? Won't it all just be anecdotal complaints from common viewers?*

I don't buy into that argument. I think when the FCC says we're here for a hearing, that you'll get new, quantifiable information — maybe even more from what I call nontraditional stakeholders — rather than the usual folks who have lawyers and know their way around the FCC.

*The FCC is, in fact, asking for quantifiable evidence, pro or con, about media consolidation. For years courts have ruled that there is such a thing as a "community standard" for decency. But you can't quantify indecency. Is there some analogy the FCC should try to make to the courts regarding a "community standard" for media consolidation?*

The courts keep saying, "You've got to be granular, you can't pick numbers out of the air." I'm not sure how a community standard for consolidation would work. But I think that anecdotal information does have a value when you go into court.

And it certainly does have a value when you go into the court of public opinion, or the court of Congress. It's not just courts we need to satisfy here when we're talking about the future of media institutions and the media landscape. Every American is affected, so there's a court of public opinion, too. I think we need to be entertaining all kinds of innovative ideas. This is an issue area that needs that.

*One of the things you are pushing for is protection of localism in news coverage by Big Media.*

Absolutely. That's fundamental. I want to understand the effects in our everyday life, day in, day out, of what's happened to localism, what's happened to local organizations, local schools, local sports team and athletics. But it goes beyond that to the coverage of small-d democratic issues, and political issues and to the kind of programming that people in their locality might be interested in. Which is not necessarily what the 18-34-year-old-oriented advertisers on Madison Avenue may be thinking that people need.

*You mentioned advertisers' concerns with monopoly owners and ad rates.*

There are studies pro and con on that, but what I've seen presents a fairly strong argument that ad rates have gone up in consolidated environments. But there's also the relation of advertising to programming. If the programming is all directed at one segment of the population, what about the advertiser who has a product for another, perhaps smaller, but still important customer base or constituency, but can't buy time for them?

*You've talked about fighting an uphill battle against too much media consolidation. How much support is there for your side?*

There seems to be a rising tide of concern in the country about consolidation. It's just starting, I think it's got a

long, long way to go. We've got to get the media doing their part to cover the issues and let the American people know these issues are up for decision. Certainly the hearing in the Senate Commerce Committee in January showed a great awareness of media consolidation, and should have sent a powerful message to anyone who was interested and listening.

*Some experts have suggested that the Internet is a viable substitute as a news outlet for TV and newspapers.*

Most Americans don't get their news from the Internet as they do from television or newspapers. Furthermore, look at the ownership of the top twenty news sites on the Internet, and who owns them. It's pretty much the people who own the networks and the cable companies. We're beginning to lose some of that openness, vitality, and diversity on the Internet. When you're looking at the ownership rules, you're looking at not only owning the newspaper and the radio and the television and maybe the cable, but throw in control of the Internet. Also keep in mind that there are large segments of our population who are not connected to the Internet. Those are all things we need to take into consideration before we say "Oh, well, we've got the Internet and ergo we have all the diversity we need." That's not reflective of reality. ■

Alicia Mundy is Washington bureau chief for CableWorld.

# THE EVOLUTION OF DEAN SINGLETON

*Once, Angry Reporters Threw Beer Cans at Him.  
Now He's Reaching for Journalistic Respectability*

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BY SCOTT SHERMAN

Last June, a leading American newspaper publisher journeyed to Moscow, where, in a gilded conference room deep in the Kremlin, he addressed an audience that included presidents George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin. The occasion was a White House- and Kremlin-sponsored summit of media executives, who will jointly endeavor to remake the Russian media along free-market lines. "A free, independent media is the backbone of democracy," the publisher proclaimed to his guests. "But media *cannot* be independent without economic viability. And that viability *must* come without government participation." The publisher was quick to

dispense advice on journalism ethics. What happens, he was asked during his visit, if a wealthy advertiser insists that a story be killed? "Listen to me," he intoned, "Never, never, never do we let an advertiser influence our independent press!"

Those sonorous words did not emanate from Donald Graham or Arthur Sulzberger Jr., but from William Dean Singleton, one of the most controversial figures in the newspaper world. *The New York Times* noted his reputation as "the industry's leading skinflint." James Squires, a former editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, described him as "a rare bird indeed," a "bone-picker publisher . . . who can wring blood from a turnip." Some newspaper veterans view the fifty-one-year-old Singleton as a latter-day Frank Munsey, who buried four New

York dailies in the early part of the last century and whom A.J. Liebling called "a mass murderer of newspapers."

Singleton is the CEO of the privately held MediaNews Group, the seventh-largest newspaper company in the U.S., with forty-eight dailies (and 121 nondailies) in eleven states. The best-known papers in MediaNews are *The Denver Post*, the *Los Angeles Daily News*, and *The Salt Lake Tribune*, which Singleton recently acquired with the aid of the Mormon church (see "The News in Mormon Country," Page 42). In constructing his empire, Singleton has included a very sharp knife among his tools, and he has used it. In 1975, after a brief, inglorious run, he closed *The Fort Worth Press*, the city's second daily, which inspired re-

*'It's pretty difficult to go blame a heart surgeon for the patients he loses and not give him credit for the scores and scores that he saves.'*

— Dean Singleton

porters to hurl beer cans at him. In 1981 he gutted the *Trenton Times*, prompting its editor to tell CJR, "The public has lost a watchdog and gained a bulletin board." In 1995 he shuttered the *Houston Post*, throwing well over a thousand people out of work and killing a publication that had served the community since 1885. Nor is Singleton known for graceful entrances. When he purchased *The Berkshire Eagle* in 1995, reporters were given a sheet of paper describing their job status and new salaries. "People were expected to read the paper and put their initials next to the words 'accept' or 'reject' on the spot," Stephen Simurda wrote in CJR. "There were virtually no negotiations. This was day one of the Singleton era."

Over the last two years, however, Singleton has undergone a remarkable rise within the industry. He was recently elected chairman of the Newspaper Association of America (NAA), which represents the interests of newspaper owners; he was twice elected to the Associated Press Board of Directors; and in 2001 he received *Editor & Publisher's* "Publisher of the Year" award, largely on the strength of his work with *The Denver Post*. Singleton has even begun to speak out against newspaper austerity measures. "Newsroom cost cuts have gone far enough — perhaps too far," he said in a recent speech. "We damaged our franchises in many cases, while Wall Street cheered."

Singleton's supporters insist that he has been treated unfairly over the years. "If journalism had an award like a medal of honor, Dean should get it," says David Burgin, who worked for Singleton for twenty-five years off and on, editing his papers in Dallas, Houston, and Oakland. "He has saved newspapers, he has saved jobs, he's made money, he's made papers viable. He's killed a few, but he's *tried*. The garbage he's taken, the crap he's taken, all comes from newsroom types. A lot of them ought to turn around and apologize."

Who is the real Dean Singleton? Is he a mass murderer of newspapers, or is he a man whose hardheaded pragmatism has enabled him, in a difficult period for the industry, to preserve many more newspaper jobs than he has eliminated? "Dean wanted to be the most profitable newspaper publisher there ever was — until he



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JOE ALLBRITTON

realized that the measurement of a good newspaper publisher isn't his profitability but his journalism," says the longtime Singleton-watcher David M. Cole, editor and publisher of *NewsInc.*, an industry newsletter. "So now all of a sudden Dean has gotten the journalism bug."

## 1. THE NEWSPAPER SURGEON

On a cold January night, I meet Singleton in the lobby of the posh Empire Hotel in midtown Manhattan. On the way to the airport, he checks in with his office. There are messages from the mayor of Salt Lake City and the governor of Colorado, both of whom are eager to speak with him. And there is a message from *The Denver Post's* editorial page editor, Sue O'Brien, seeking guidance on an editorial about President Bush's intervention in the University of Michigan affirmative-action case. (Singleton holds the title of publisher of *The Denver Post*, and keeps a close watch on editorials.) "I think affirmative action is critical," he tells her from the back of the car. "But there is a place to draw the line. I can go either way on this particular issue. I love my friend" — he's referring to Bush — "but I don't have to support him all the time."

The car arrives at the airport. Walking toward his private jet, a sleek Israeli-made Westwind II, Singleton is slightly un-

steady on his feet. One morning in 1986, he woke up with numbness in his legs, and was soon diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. He remains extraordinarily active, but he says that each year his legs get progressively weaker, and he has confided to friends that on certain mornings he has trouble getting out of bed.

The plane's interior is cramped and confined, but Singleton is immediately at home. Within seconds, the pilot brings him a glass of Chardonnay. Singleton is wearing gray slacks, a light blue shirt (with his initials — "WDS" — embroidered on the pocket) and a bright red tie. His trousers are held up by red and blue suspenders. He has piercing blue eyes, and a laconic Texas drawl.

The most peculiar thing about Singleton's career is the fact that he never had the money to buy first-rank dailies and he could never afford to start new papers, even if he had wanted to. His method has been to pick up ailing ones — which, in some cases, he then buried.

I asked him whether he's killing newspapers or saving them.

"How would you ask that question to a heart surgeon?" he replies. "It's pretty difficult to go blame a heart surgeon for the patients he loses on the table and not give him credit for the scores and scores that he saves." Singleton pauses. "I took on a lot of patients who looked pretty certain they were gonna die, but I tried very hard to save them. And we saved most of them. But we had a few that, despite everything we did, we couldn't save. And once the heart stopped beating, it was silly to keep 'em on life support."

## 2. UP FROM TEXAS

Dean Singleton's extraordinary business savvy has made him a full-fledged member of the American elite. He earns more than a million dollars a year; he cavorts with presidents and senators; he is a leading member of Denver society. His primary residence, where he lives with his wife, Adrienne, and three children, is a stunning mansion in Denver's wealthiest neighborhood, a mansion that contains eleven bathrooms and an elevator, since he has difficulty climbing stairs. Singleton also owns four cattle ranches in Colorado,



RICHARD SCUDDER

along with a home on Cape Cod where, during the summer months, he goes sailing with the musician James Taylor.

Unlike some of his peers in the NAA, however, Singleton was not born to wealth; he did not inherit his newspapers. A few weeks ago, on a trip through Texas, Singleton took me to his hometown, Graham, which sits ninety miles west of Fort Worth, and which is surrounded by oil fields and ranchland in every direction. It's a superconservative, superreligious place, mostly white, with more than fifty churches serving a population of nine thousand. Singleton will be buried here, alongside his parents, in a small cemetery on the outskirts of town.

For much of his youth, he lived in a ramshackle four-room house on Pecan Street, in a grim section of Graham. The house is still there — an extremely modest place, five hundred square feet, with chickens and roosters galloping in the backyard. It has a bathroom now, but when Singleton lived here the toilet was outside. The day we arrive, the house has a terrible stench: it is being fumigated for rats and mice. Singleton doesn't mind; he lurches through the living room, his face a mask of joy and wonder. Forty years have passed since he's been inside.

Singleton's father toiled as a day laborer in the oil fields — a "roustabout" in Texas lingo — but frequently there was no work, so he came home early. "We didn't

*'He has saved newspapers, he has saved jobs, he's made money, he's made papers viable. He's killed a few, but he's tried.'*

— David Burgin

have anything," Singleton says. At night he would lie in bed with a transistor radio, and, as a result of clear-channel signals, would pick up stations from New York and Oklahoma City, which instilled in him a sense of the larger world. At the age of six, he would walk a few blocks to the four-thousand-circulation *Graham Leader* and watch the papers roll off the presses; sometimes the pressmen bought him ice cream. By age eighteen, he had been a sportswriter for both the *Leader* and its crosstown competitor, the *News*. (Many years later, in 1986, Singleton purchased the *Graham Leader*, and he takes an active interest in its affairs.)

After a series of small-town newspaper jobs in Texas, Singleton landed at the *Dallas Morning News* in 1970, and worked in the newsroom at night while attending the University of Texas at Arlington by day. But he already knew that he wanted his own newspapers, so he quit school and moved to a small town in the Texas Panhandle, Clarendon, where he bought a tiny weekly. He never finished college, and has no degree. "He's not well read," says David Burgin, who, over the years, was fired and rehired on several occasions by Singleton, and who knows him as well as anyone. "He doesn't sit down with a new book three times a week. He doesn't spend his time in the movies or the theater. He doesn't get lost in the opera or the arts. He's not particularly well educated. But he has an instinctiveness about people and business."

By 1975 Singleton was the owner of eight small weeklies in West Texas, but he was "getting itchy." So he set his sights on *The Fort Worth Press*, which Scripps Howard wanted to unload. Singleton, with borrowed money, rolled into Fort Worth with a new Lincoln Continental, and tried to revive the paper. "I don't think," he wrote in a memo to the staff, "it is too much to ask for five or more stories out of each reporter each day." But reporters were expected to do more than write; they had to shop, too. As Singleton wrote in another memo:

On page 5 of today's *Press*, you will find an ad from Mitchell's Department Store . . . Mitchell's is comparing our results with the morning *Star-Telegram's* . . . If we make a good showing we will have a regular schedule of advertising from Mitchell's. If they don't receive many coupons, we likely won't get their advertising. In a sense, YOUR JOBS DEPEND ON THE NUMBER OF COUPONS MITCHELL'S GETS FROM

THIS ADVERTISEMENT. Please get your wives to look at this ad, decide what items you can use from this ad and TAKE THE COUPONS to a nearby Mitchell's store . . . I'll see you at Mitchell's today!!!

The newspaper folded after eighty-eight days. "It was a total disaster," says Singleton. "I knew nothing about the business of newspapering." He lost a million dollars in the demise of *The Fort Worth Press*, and he had to sell his weeklies to pay his debts. The experience put him in the hospital for depression and exhaustion. "In twelve weeks it closed, and he lost his ass," says David Burgin. "Poor Dean kicked around and couldn't find anything. And he was only twenty-four years old."

### 3. THE YEARS WITH ALLBRITTON

In August 1976 Singleton found himself in the executive dining room of *The Washington Star*, face to face with the *Star's* owner, Joe L. Allbritton, whose background bore some resemblance to Singleton's. Born in D'Lo, Mississippi, during the Great Depression, Allbritton spent his early years in Texas, acquired banks, real estate, and even funeral homes — some *Star* reporters called him "the little mortician" — and purchased Washington's second newspaper in 1974. In 1978 he sold the *Star* to Time Inc., while retaining his television properties; today he owns nine ABC affiliates — he renamed his Washington station, WJLA, to match his own initials — and is believed to be worth as much as a billion dollars.

Over lunch, Singleton informed Allbritton of his plan to buy a small daily in Westfield, Massachusetts, *The Westfield Evening News*. Might he be interested in putting up the money for it? Allbritton, as Singleton tells the story, was not interested. Singleton says, "Joe had decided I was too young, and he didn't really know if he wanted this little paper anyway." Allbritton said goodbye and good luck. "I got up," Singleton recalls, "and pushed my coat back, and he saw I had suspenders. I was walking out the door and he said, 'Young man! Young man! Will you come back here?' He said, 'Any twenty-five-year-old who wears suspenders has got to be conservative. You go up there and buy the newspaper and I'll wire 'em the money.'"

In short order, Allbritton purchased a number of papers for Singleton to run, mostly in New Jersey. The papers were

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*'I told the unions if they walked out that I'd never let them back. They walked out and never came back. We started making money.'*

*—Dean Singleton*

floundering, and had to be, to use a favorite phrase of Singleton's, "turned around." It was Singleton's view that cost-cutting — combined with a relentless emphasis on local news — was the way to proceed; his editors didn't always agree. In 1976, when Singleton moved to Westfield to publish the *Evening News*, he asked David Burgin, then editing Allbritton's paper in Paterson, to come to Massachusetts as the temporary editor. Burgin was less than thrilled with the assignment, for he was on a downward trajectory within Allbritton's media empire. "Jesus," he recalls, "just a year ago I was working at *The Washington Star*, trying to bring down the president, and look at me now!"

Burgin knew that some readers would be interested in the Camp David peace talks then under way between Jimmy Carter, Menachen Begin, and Anwar Sadat. On the day they reached the accord, Burgin, laying out the front page, made Camp David the top story. Singleton came in and peered over his shoulder. "Damn it!" Singleton shouted in his thick drawl, "this is a local paper! We don't sell no fucking papers in Cairo! Get that thing off there, right now!" "Get your sorry ass out of here!" Burgin replied, as he recalls it. "I'm the editor of this newspaper!" Singleton fired him on the spot, but Burgin stuck around to close the evening edition.

At the time, Burgin was staying with Singleton at a nearby house. Still smoldering, Burgin drove there later and saw Singleton's car in the driveway. Burgin heard a splash. "There was a pool, and there's Dean about chest deep in the shallow end. He looks at me for about thirty seconds."

"I told you you're fired!" Singleton roared.

"Sitting beside the pool," says Burgin, "was a contraption, a cage. Inside there's a strange looking bulb, a blue light. It was a bug zapper. It's plugged in by the pool. I looked at that bug zapper and I looked at Dean. I looked at the bug zapper and I looked back at Dean. After about three of those he said, 'No, no, no!'"

"He thinks I'm going to kick it in the pool and he'll be a slice of bacon floating

on the top of the pool. He says, 'That would be murder!' I said, 'who's gonna know, asshole?' He took about point eight seconds to get out of the pool."

Burgin was back at work the next day.

#### 4. TRENTON TAKEOVER

Working for Allbritton could be stressful. In 1981 Singleton found himself enmeshed in a labor dispute at *The Paterson News*, where the unionized typographers and drivers were restive. In the course of the strike, the workers were swiftly vanquished. "We were losing money, and had to fix it, so we took on the unions and threw 'em out," Singleton recalls. The strike got ugly, and for six months Singleton lived in a spare room inside the newspaper. "I told them if they walked out that I'd never let them back," he says. "They walked out and they never came back." Asked if he has any regrets, Singleton grins. "No. When they left, we started making money."

In the late 1970s, much of the industry was watching the heated newspaper war in New Jersey between the *Trenton Times* — owned by the Washington Post Company — and a tabloid competitor, *The Trentonian*. In the mid-1970s, Katharine Graham had decided that she wanted to transform the *Times* into a first-rate newspaper, and sent some top editors to Trenton to remake it. But Trenton residents didn't necessarily want a smaller version of *The Washington Post*; many of them preferred the localized news of *The Trentonian*, which stuffed its pages with cheerful photographs of local residents. Big profits at the *Times* never materialized, and Kay Graham eventually came to see the acquisition as her "Vietnam."

In recent discussions with *CJR*, Singleton revealed that Kay Graham had asked him to take over the *Trenton Times* and stem the losses. Singleton had become friendly with Donald Graham in 1977, and when Allbritton asked Singleton to run the beleaguered *Star* for a year — a year in which the paper turned an operating profit — the Grahams had been im-

pressed. "Kay Graham in 1980 offered me the job to come run it," Singleton says of the *Trenton Times*. "She offered me the publisher's job and twenty percent of the stock" in a new company that would also buy other newspapers.

But Singleton says he felt enormous loyalty to Allbritton, and a certain reluctance to go work for his primary competitor — Kay Graham. "Joe picked me up when I was down. I had just lost my ass in Fort Worth, and Joe gave me my second chance," Singleton turned down the offer.

He claims he then got a call from Kay Graham, who said: "If you won't go and run it for me, buy the thing." So he and Allbritton did. "*The Washington Post* basically gave it to us," Singleton says today. Two days after the purchase, Singleton fired sixty *Trenton Times* staff members. In the subsequent months, as reporters fled, many observers insisted that a great newspaper was being dismantled. In one notorious instance, a cub reporter was fired for adding a handful of relevant details to a press release about a department store closing. (He had been instructed to run the press release word for word.) *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that, in at least one instance, the *Trenton Times* had published a news story in exchange for an advertisement.

In 1986 Allbritton sold the paper to Newhouse for a rumored \$62 million. Singleton notes with satisfaction and defiance, "we saved the *Trenton Times* and made it dominant."

#### 5. THE BIG LEAGUES

Eventually, Singleton grew weary of working for Allbritton — especially since Allbritton declined to make him a partner. "Joe Allbritton never has partners," Singleton grumbled to *The New York Times* in 1987. So Singleton looked elsewhere for opportunities. In the late 1970s, he became friendly with one of his creditors — Richard Scudder, chairman of the Garden State Paper Company, New Jersey's only manufacturer of newsprint. (In fact, Scudder himself invented the technology behind recycled newsprint.) In 1983 Single-

ton informed Allbritton he was launching a newspaper company, later to be called MediaNews, with Scudder.

Scudder knew the business. His grandfather founded *The Newark News*, New Jersey's much-admired newspaper of record. In 1970 Scudder sold the ailing paper to Media General, which soon closed it. In 1972 Richard Reeves published in *CJR* an article entitled, "Newark's Fallen Giant: Euthanasia or Murder?," wherein he said that the *News* had been "mismanaged, or unmanaged, on a mind-boggling scale by the third generation of the Scudder family." Richard Scudder sued Reeves and *CJR*; the case was settled back in 1977, but the wounds inflicted by the article are still fresh. In a recent interview on the twentieth floor of MediaNews headquarters in Denver, Scudder, who remains sprightly at the age of 89, erupted when Richard Reeves is mentioned. "Shoot the bastard!" he exclaimed.

Together, Singleton and Scudder purchased newspapers in Massachusetts, Ohio, New Jersey, and California. Their first metro acquisition — from *Times Mirror* — was the *Dallas Times Herald*, the city's number two daily. The *Times Herald* was far from healthy: the year Singleton bought it, it lost \$9 million. *Times Mirror* was relieved to unburden itself of the paper; it had never found a way to make the *Times Herald* work. For their part, reporters — recalling the evisceration of the *Trenton Times* — responded to the news of the sale with trepidation. The *Boston Globe* reported in 1987 that Singleton's arrival in Dallas "caused near pandemonium in the newsroom."

The *Times Herald* was Singleton's first purchase of a major newspaper, and it was something of a milestone for him — his arrival in the big leagues. For Dean Singleton, being a cost-conscious boy publisher was never easy. He had trouble socializing with reporters and editors, some of whom made fun of him behind his back, ridiculing his noticeable lisp. After the press conference announcing the purchase of the *Times Herald*, David Burgin, who was to edit the paper, walked out to get his car, and found Singleton alone by the loading docks.

"He was standing there, just looking," Burgin asked him if he was okay. "Yeah,"



Singleton replied. "I just spent \$120 million dollars, and I never spent \$120 million dollars before." Burgin remembers, "He turned around and there were tears coming down his eyes. He was lost. He'd just done this incredible thing. He didn't have anywhere to go. He didn't have anybody to have dinner with. What are you going to do, go back to the hotel room and watch TV after spending \$120 million dollars? He needed attention. I gave it to him." They drank twelve-dollar shots of brandy at a fine hotel bar.

But the purchase turned out to be a mistake. The *Times Herald*, Singleton says, "was a blue-collar paper in a white-collar market" with a weak Sunday edition. And it came out in the afternoon, while the heavy-weight establishment *News* ruled the morning. On top of this, the Texas economy was in terrible shape. "You could just see the trend line," he says today, "and it wasn't good. I bought it out of emotion. It's 120 miles from where I was born, a paper I grew up admiring and respecting." After eighteen months, he sold the *Times Herald* to an associate, who closed it. Singleton still walked away with \$15 million from the sale.

In September 1987, he stunned the newspaper world by announcing two major acquisitions — the *Houston Post* and *The Denver Post*. Houston was the reverse of Dallas, Singleton says, "a white-collar paper in a blue-collar market," but the Sunday edition was similarly weak.

Eight years later, in 1995, Singleton

sold the assets of the *Houston Post* to its main competitor, Hearst, publisher of the dominant *Houston Chronicle*, for \$120 million. The *Houston Post* was a corpse. Employees of the *Post* were enraged, and have remained so ever since; today they refer to him as "Stinky Singleton." In a scorching letter published in *CJR*, the assistant editorial page editor, Charles Reinken, noted that for 111 years, the *Post* "printed the news, got a few rascals thrown out, earned a Pulitzer along the way, conceded nothing to the competition, and showed great heart . . . Singleton killed it without even the decency of a farewell edition — a death without a funeral."

Writing in the *Houston Press*, an alternative weekly, Tim Fleck and Jim Simon revealed in 1995 that Singleton had secretly reached an agreement with Hearst eight months before the *Post* was shuttered, but went through the motions of publicly seeking a buyer to gain the nod of the Justice Department, which might have objected on antitrust grounds. Today, Singleton doesn't dispute the *Houston Press* account. But he maintains that he offered the *Post* to forty-eight buyers, and that one of them, the Belo Corporation, offered \$70 million, \$50 million less than Hearst, but the deal fell through.

Today, Singleton admits that buying the *Houston Post* was another mistake, but he claims he prolonged the newspaper's life. "It would have died right away," in 1987, if he hadn't bought it, he says. "I gave it seven years it wouldn't have had." Certainly, the *Post's* editorial side had been weakened by its previous owners, and with or without Singleton, it had enormous woes.

In any case, the *Post's* demise left a gaping hole in Houston journalism. Tim Fleck explains that the city used to have a series of pressrooms in downtown Houston — one in city hall, one in the federal building, one at the police station. "When the *Post* and the *Chronicle* were competing," he says, "those newsrooms were just incredible hubs of activity," which drew in TV crews as well. The death of the *Post* has "really put the damper on intensive media coverage of governmental affairs in town."

*'Singleton killed the Houston Post without even the decency of a farewell edition — a death without a funeral.'*

— Charles Reinken

## Dean Singleton's Dailies



Singleton's fifty daily newspapers (forty eight owned by MediaNews) have a total circulation of 2.1 million daily and 2.4 million Sunday. California's papers are clustered in the Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay areas. The largest holdings are in Denver, L.A., and Salt Lake City. Dailies listed in red have a circulation of 20,000 to 100,000. Those represented with stars have less than 20,000 circulation. The company also owns 121 nondailies, with a circulation of 2.8 million.

### 6. CALIFORNIA CONQUEST

From the start, MediaNews focused much of its energy on California. In 1985 Singleton purchased a group of dailies in the fast-growing suburbs around San Francisco, and they have nearly doubled in circulation since then. In 1992 Singleton bought the *Oakland Tribune*, which was losing about \$1 million a month. The paper had been a beacon for African-American journalists as the only major paper with a black owner (the late Robert Maynard). But Single-

ton didn't buy it for sentimental reasons; he controlled the market in Alameda County, of which Oakland is the county and cultural seat. If the *Oakland Tribune* had folded, Singleton explains, "*The San Francisco Chronicle* would have picked up most of the circulation, and we would have invited a new competitor into our market. We couldn't let that happen." (By reducing the staff from 630 to 280, Singleton eventually made the *Oakland Tribune* profitable.)

For years his Northern California papers pooled their resources — they even

had a centralized copy-editing center for all the publications. Lately, they have pulled back from that strategy, giving more autonomy to the individual papers, but from an advertising perspective, this "clustering" has paid off handsomely. Individually, his papers could not attract national and large department store advertising. Together they have a circulation of 380,000, which makes them a viable option for larger advertisers.

In the mid-1990s, Singleton made a major push into Southern California as well, again following the "clustering"

*'You gotta climb the ladder and pay your dues. That's what the business has always been about.'*

— Dean Singleton

*'We outmaneuvered them on the business side. We kicked butt on advertising and circulation. They blew a lot of money. We didn't.'*

*— Dean Singleton*

strategy, buying half a dozen papers, most notably the Los Angeles *Daily News*. These acquisitions gave Singleton control over a huge swath of suburban Los Angeles. He was eager to keep expanding, and in 1997 he made an offer for the *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin*, located in a fast-growing suburban zone. When the owners, the Stephens Media Group, declined his request, Singleton came back with a proposal that revealed the full range of his business acumen. Could MediaNews and Stephens, he suggested, combine their papers in a partnership, and divide the profits accordingly? Stephens found the offer attractive (largely for tax reasons) and agreed to contribute twelve dailies to the consortium. This was born the California Newspaper Partnership, which also includes Gannett, which added two papers. MediaNews currently controls 55 percent of CNP.

Nothing is more illustrative of Singleton's business acumen than his unpublished deal with Times Mirror, the owner of the *Los Angeles Times*, concerning the Los Angeles *Daily News*. In 1997 the *Daily News* went up for sale, and Singleton was eager to purchase it. Still, he had some concerns: "We were a little reluctant to get into a head-to-head battle with Times Mirror. They were very good friends." For antitrust reasons, Times Mirror could not purchase the *Daily News*, and it was concerned about who might; its executives didn't want a fierce competitor — like Rupert Murdoch — in their core market. A creative solution was found: Times Mirror lent Singleton \$50 million of the \$130 million-dollar purchase price to buy the *Daily News*. Moreover, Singleton and Times Mirror forged a plan to sell preprint advertising together. "I don't think Dean has competitors," says David Cole, of NewsInc. "Dean has business partners who he hasn't done business with yet."

All this was too much for the Justice Department, which, in 1998, launched a yearlong investigation. In the end, Justice gave its approval to the advertising deal, but pushed to end the possibility

that the *Daily News* could fall into Times Mirror's hands. But Singleton's lawyers convinced the feds to grant the Tribune Company (which bought Times Mirror) a twelve-year option to buy the *Daily News*, since it would require approval from Justice and probably won't ever take place.

Still, all is not well in Singleton's California empire. The economy remains weak, and many of his papers are plagued by high turnover, due to the low salaries paid to reporters and editors.

Sean Holstege, a reporter and union officer at *The Oakland Tribune*, claims that Singleton's Northern California papers average a 30 percent turnover rate. Many reporters earn as little as \$26,000. "I know employees who skip meals," says Holstege. "I know employees who have slept in cars until they found affordable housing. I know one person who got pregnant and was weeping when she found out. She had no idea how she would pay for it."

Singleton offers a blunt defense of his wage scale. "We pay the salaries that a newspaper that size pays around the country," he declares. "That's the economic model that works for that size newspaper." Staffers who disagree, he says, should follow another career path — that of the young Dean Singleton: "I was at the same place they were. I started on small papers and went up the ladder as I got experience." He doesn't mince words: "You gotta climb the ladder. That's what the business has always been about. That's what it's always gonna be about. You gotta climb the ladder and pay your dues."

Meanwhile, Singleton's California empire continues to expand. In January MediaNews purchased one of the last independent papers in the northern part of the state, the *Paradise Post* in Butte County. On January 20, I sat in on MediaNews's weekly publishers' meeting, where the *Paradise Post* deal was under discussion. "Is there a union there?" inquired one of Singleton's lieutenants. "No," replied another. "Why do you think they call it *Paradise*?"

## 7. VICTORY IN DENVER

For Singleton, paradise — or at least a major-league success — is *The Denver Post*, the second paper he bought from Times Mirror. This time the surgery worked, and his accomplishment is widely recognized as a competitive triumph. As was the case in Dallas, Times Mirror unloaded the ailing *Post* on him at a very attractive price — \$25 million in cash, plus \$70 million in long-term notes. Times Mirror also gave Singleton forty-five acres near downtown Denver. "Denver was a nice acquisition," Singleton says with a grin. During the last year of Times Mirror ownership, the *Post* lost \$15 million, but the paper had certain things going for it, mainly a young, educated readership and an expanding market.

Singleton found himself in the middle of the country's last great newspaper war, a war in which the *Post* had been battling the *Rocky Mountain News* for more than a century, a war that had been injurious to both papers. On the business side, Singleton moved to strengthen newspaper delivery and billing, both of which had been faulty under Times Mirror ownership. Editorially, the *Post* decreased its crime coverage and stepped up its life-style and cultural coverage. "I am not dumbing down the paper," Dennis Britton, the editor at the time, told *The New York Times* in 1996. "I am crime-ing it down and Pollyanna-ing it up, because I am looking for a positive spin on things."

The *Rocky* continued to bleed money. In 1997 Scripps, which owned the *Rocky*, panicked and began to offer the paper for a penny a year, less than \$4 for the year; that gave the *Rocky* a circulation lead but ultimately cost Scripps \$25 million. The *Rocky*, in 2000, finally gave up and asked to enter into a joint operating agreement with the *Post*. As part of the deal, Scripps paid MediaNews \$60 million.

"We outmaneuvered them on the business side," says Singleton. "We kicked butt on advertising and circulation. We



**THE BOSS:** Greg Moore, the new editor of *The Denver Post*, met his staff last May after Singleton hired him away from *The Boston Globe*.

were much more efficient. They blew a lot of money. We didn't blow any money. We spent every nickel where it needed to be spent." In the decade leading up to the JOA, the *Rocky Mountain News* hemorrhaged \$124 million, while the *Post* earned \$200 million.

Why didn't Singleton simply wait for the *Rocky* to die, and then dominate the whole market?

To begin with, he says, he had heard that one of Colorado's wealthiest citizens was interested in the paper, and he was afraid of a new infusion of cash and a much longer newspaper war. "I have multiple sclerosis," he says. "I've beat the system for seventeen years, but I don't know that I'll always beat the system. I don't know at what point in time it will finally launch that big attack and throw me in the wheelchair or kill me. And I didn't want to fight the battle for five more years."

He also wanted to accomplish something journalistically. "The *Post* was a pretty darn good newspaper before the JOA. But I wouldn't call it one of the five best in the country," he says. "I want to give this market a world-class newspaper, and I couldn't afford to do it with the battle going on."

Soon after the purchase, Singleton moved his headquarters and his home to Denver. He went through several publishers before assuming the title himself. Last

year, Singleton added the final piece, a new editor, Greg Moore, from *The Boston Globe*. In his seven months on the job, Moore has moved, with Singleton's backing, to strengthen the paper. There is much work to be done; today most of the main section consists of wire copy. Moore hired top editors from the *Chicago Tribune*, *Newsday*, and *The Dallas Morning News*; he is in the process of opening the paper's first foreign bureau — in the Middle East — and hopes to open a second one in Latin America in the near future. The *Post's* newsroom currently has 230 employees, but Moore talks of adding seventy to a hundred more. Diversity is a high priority, "and I think I have a full partner in Dean in that," Moore says.

A striking feature of the JOA in Denver is the extent to which the *News* also benefits from the arrangement. Profits are divided fifty-fifty, even though the *Post* is the stronger paper and has the Sunday edition. The arrangement is not very Singletonian, so I ask him why he structured the deal that way. He emits a low groan. "Can you squeeze a few million a year out by doing it another way? Perhaps." Says the man *Editor & Publisher* once labeled "lean Dean": "You know, I'm not really into squeezing a few more million out. I'm not a money guy." The *Post's* editorial page editor, Sue O'Brien, offers another explanation. "He wants to be remem-

bered for the excellence of the *Post*, but he also doesn't want to be remembered as the scrooge who put the *Rocky* to death."

Some editors who work at Singleton's smaller papers give him credit for improving their publications; they insist his reputation as an enemy of newspapers is largely mythological. Kevin Keane edits *The Lowell Sun*, purchased by MediaNews in 1997. Before that, he worked at another Singleton paper, the *Lebanon Daily News*, in Lebanon, Pennsylvania. Keane notes that Singleton bought the Lebanon paper from Thomson, which had neglected it. "When it rained, the mainframe got wet and the system went down for a day or two," he says. "The computer system itself hadn't been updated for a decade. Thomson didn't seem to care."

"Dean brought in a new publisher and let him hire new people to lead the departments. In the course of two years, he sank about \$1 million into plant upgrades, including a new front-end system and roof. As a result, the paper turned itself around."

Among the papers in Singleton's empire is *The Berkshire Eagle*, which has a reputation as one of the nation's finest small dailies. When Singleton bought the paper in 1995, it was nearly bankrupt. After seven years of ownership, *Eagle* veterans give him a mixed report card. Grier

*'I've discussed [cross-ownership rules] with Bush. I know the people at the FCC on a first-name basis now.'* — Dean Singleton

*'If he's got one eye on his legacy, he's still got the other eye on the cash register.'*  
— David Burgin

Horner, who worked at the paper for thirty years, notes that Singleton broke the union, fired staff members, and reduced salaries by as much as 30 percent; his own salary was cut by \$9,000 a year. Still, "Singleton has been respectful of the paper," says Horner. "He hasn't meddled with the newsroom. He's given the newsroom autonomy." Concludes Horner: "He was not the worst thing that could have happened to *The Berkshire Eagle*."

## 8. WASHINGTON INSIDER

These days, as his newspaper empire continues to expand, Singleton's attention is focused on a different medium — television. Since he joined the NAA's board in 1993, he has been actively working to overturn the FCC's restrictions on cross-ownership — an issue that has moved to the forefront in recent months, as the FCC considers lifting the rule that prevents newspapers from purchasing TV stations in their own markets (see "Power Shift," Page 26).

On this matter, Singleton exudes the confidence of a well-informed insider, which he very much is. The NAA, which includes almost all of the nation's leading newspaper publishers, has made it clear that it wants the free market to prevail on cross-ownership, and Singleton, as NAA president, is pushing hard on the issue. Over the last decade, he has personally discussed the cross-ownership rule with Vice President Al Gore and a long list of senators, including Bob Dole. He has also taken it up with his "good friend," George W. Bush. "I've discussed it with him on numerous occasions," says Singleton. "I've discussed it with his staff. I know the people at the FCC on a first-name basis now."

Singleton confidently predicts that the FCC will overturn the restrictions by the middle of 2003. If that happens, he will move quickly to purchase TV stations in the markets where he already has newspapers.

Will his profits skyrocket under a system in which he can soak up advertising dollars for both print and television?

"There's a chance we'll gain financially," he admits. "But the bigger picture is the fact that we'll be able to

strengthen newspapers and keep them strong. We'll be able to spend more money to cover news."

Singleton insists he's not "a money guy"; he insists that good journalism always comes first; and yet one gets the sense that he is reading from a script. As we flew from Texas to Denver on his private jet, Singleton discussed his work with the Russian media, and noted that MediaNews and Gannett have together pledged to raise \$50 million in venture capital for the Russian press; the money will serve as ownership investment. Singleton fervently believes that a "free press" — by which he means a privatized press — can bring "democracy" to Russia; and that anyone who enlists in that venture will be making an imperishable contribution to freedom in the former Soviet Union. "Russia has the opportunity to aim missiles at us," he intones. "If we don't help their democracy work, those missiles will get aimed at us again."

I don't want my kids to have nuclear drills, like I did."

A few minutes later, as the jet begins its descent into Denver, Singleton can't resist adding: "Somebody's gonna make a ton of money on the media in Russia. It's in its infancy. It is gonna be a major, major opportunity, from a capital standpoint." It's clear that he plans to take full advantage of that opportunity. It's a powerful reminder that Singleton's long journey, from the dilapidated backstreets of Graham to the gilded corridors of power, has entailed evolution and continuity alike — but mostly continuity. "If he's got one eye on his legacy," says David Burgin, "he's still got the other eye on the cash register." ■

Scott Sherman is a contributing editor to *CJR*. His article about The Atlantic Monthly appeared in November/December. Nick Engstrom, a *CJR* intern, contributed research to this article.

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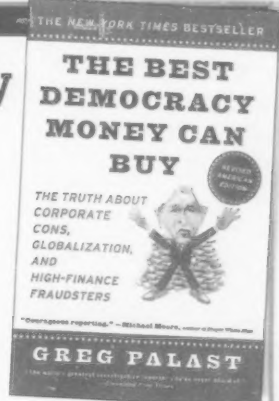
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OVERSIGHT: A portrait of Brigham Young, an early head of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, hangs in the Salt Lake City Council meeting room.

DOUG REAC

# THE NEWS IN MORMON COUNTRY

*For more than a century, one newspaper has been  
a counterweight to a powerful church.  
Will Dean Singleton alter the balance?*

BY MICHAEL SCHERER

**B**righam Young, the only American prophet ever to establish a major theocracy west of the Rockies, still hovers over meetings of the Salt Lake City Council. His portrait hangs in the back of the room, larger than life, gazing into the middle distance, his hand on the Book of Mormon, a globe at his feet.

Almost anywhere else, this symbolic blurring of church and state might seem exceptional. But in Utah, the line was never clearly drawn. More than a century after Young founded a new Zion on the western frontier, the region still functions as a quasi-theocracy. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints still dominates politics, local media, and culture. It claims membership of roughly two-thirds of the

state's residents and annual revenues that have been estimated at \$6 billion. It is Utah's largest employer and Salt Lake City's largest landowner. Roughly 90 percent of the state legislature is Mormon, as are the governor, the House and Senate delegations, and a majority of the state's supreme court and federal judiciary. In addition to Salt Lake's afternoon daily, the *Deseret News*, the church owns the state's largest television and news radio station and is buying two more of Salt Lake's top five radio stations. Public schools still allow midday recesses for religious study; some have even banned Monday night activities in deference to the church's traditional time for family worship. Mormons who publicly criticize church doctrine can still face excommunication, and critical news sources sometimes run the risk of ecclesiastical sanction.

For 132 years, Utah's other major daily, *The Salt Lake Tribune*, has more or less defined itself against these interests. Far more than the *Deseret News*, the *Tribune* has reported aggressively in recent years on the political favors that benefited the church, on the ties between the Mormon church and the Salt Lake Olympic Organizing Committee, and the church's controversial conversion of a piece of Main Street into a religious park. The paper infuriated church leaders with a three-day series about a frontier massacre that may have been ordered by Brigham Young. But the newspaper's independence is now in question.

Last summer, the *Tribune* came under new management. On July 30, one of the newspaper's ousted owners, Philip McCarthy, stood on a reporter's desk in the middle of the newsroom and implored

his soon-to-be former employees to "hang in there a little longer" as his legal fight to regain control of the paper continued. "I object like hell to some outsider coming in here who doesn't know this community," he bellowed. Two days later, William Dean Singleton took over, the beneficiary of one of the most bitterly fought newsroom takeovers in recent memory.

One fact made many in the newsroom and community nervous about Singleton: he had arrived in Utah with the approval of the Mormon church. While he praised the aggressive reporting done under the previous owners, he made clear that he does not share the view that the *Tribune* has a special mission in specifically challenging church power. For him, journalism is journalism and he plans to run the *Tribune* as he runs his other papers. "We've just ended a long era of the non-Mormons having a newspaper to compete with the Mormons," Singleton explained. "The new era is we are the newspaper for all of Utah."

So a divided community continues to follow the ownership drama, a drama that could still oust Singleton any day. He and his editors are under special scrutiny. More than the fate of a single newspaper hangs in the balance. "I still get questions everywhere I go: 'Have you lost your voice yet?'" says Peggy Fletcher Stack, the *Tribune's* religion writer. "Everyone is kind of holding their breath."

**T**hroughout its history, the Mormon church has wrestled with how to deal with its critics. Journalists have, at times, been caught up in the struggle. "Journalism is about questions. Religion is about answers, comfortable answers," explains Cal Grondahl, a Mormon editorial cartoonist who once worked for the *Deseret News*. "Journalists, we are the bad news."

In 1844 dissident Mormons in Illinois created a newspaper called the *Nauvoo Expositor*, aiming to expose the polygamy and "political schemes" of the faith's



founding prophet, Joseph Smith, who also served as Nauvoo's mayor. After one printing, Smith ordered the paper burned and its presses destroyed. The move proved a fatal mistake. Smith was arrested within days on the order of the Illinois governor. An anti-Mormon mob promptly murdered him in jail, spurring the exodus that led Brigham Young to Utah.

Twenty-five years later, Young faced a similar dilemma astride the salt flats. Though stripped of his title "territorial governor" by the federal government, Young still directed the commercial, political, and religious development of the region. So he took notice when a band of independent Mormons began printing the *Utah Magazine*, directly challenging Young's top-down economic plan for the region. Young excommunicated the magazine's founders, and then banned Mormons from reading the magazine. "They had imbibed the spirit of apostasy," Young wrote in the *Deseret News*. Their teachings "would destroy Zion, divide the people asunder, and drive the holy priesthood from the earth." The shunned editors closed their magazine, but were not defeated. They soon founded a new daily newspaper called *The Salt Lake Tribune*.

Over the next 132 years, relations be-

tween the *Tribune* and the church-owned *Deseret News* cycled through stages of re-criminations and tolerance. At its inception in 1871, the *Tribune's* owners promised to "oppose all ecclesiastical interference in civil or legislative matters." In practice, this often meant mounting crass campaigns against the church's hold on politics and commerce, while harping incessantly on the practice of polygamy, the church's Achilles' heel. The relationship with the church so deteriorated that in 1873 the Mormon City Council banned *Tribune* reporters from its meetings. *Tribune* editors responded by accusing the church-state leadership of "bigotry, fraud, rancor, and delusion," and later labeled the *Deseret News* "the lying Church organ." The *News*, always defending the church, decried the *Tribune's* editors as

"dirty-minded scandal mongers," "pen-stabbers," and "defamers of the dead."

The war of words tempered considerably when Phil McCarthy's great-grandfather, Senator Thomas Kearns, purchased the *Tribune* at the turn of the century shortly after his election — a deft political move given the *Tribune's* critical coverage of his candidacy. Kearns, a Catholic miner enriched by silver, lead, and zinc, had been elected with the essential blessing of the church, in line with a now-lapsed tradition of electing one non-Mormon senator. After one term, however, the church blessing was revoked, sinking his hope for re-election. A "church monarchy," he declared later in his last speech on the Senate floor, "rules all politics in Utah." Upon returning to Utah, he committed his family to the legacy it now struggles to uphold. "Until there is a complete separation of church and state, the *Tribune* will not pass into the hands of any man or number of men who are not committed to the cause which this newspaper has so long espoused," he wrote in the *Tribune*.

The years that followed, however, were ones of relative harmony, largely free of anti-Mormon crusades. A new relationship was formalized in 1952, more than thirty years after Kearns's death, in what later became known as "The Great Ac-



**RALLYING CRY:** Philip McCarthy, ex-owner of *The Salt Lake Tribune*, addresses his former employees on July 30, 2002. "I object like hell to some outsider coming in here who doesn't know this community."

commodation." Approached by the church president while recovering from a heart attack, the *Tribune's* publisher, John Fitzpatrick, agreed to merge his printing, advertising, and circulation departments with those of the church-owned *Deseret News*. Two decades before the Newspaper Preservation Act, the two papers formed a nascent joint operating agreement (JOA), with the *Tribune* published in the morning, the *Deseret News* in the afternoon. "Without that, the *Deseret News* would have gone down the drain," says Jack Gallivan, who is the eighty-seven-year-old adopted son of Senator Kearns's widow, and who followed Fitzpatrick as publisher. The same might have been said about the *Tribune*, which, like its new partner, was reeling from a costly and fruitless circulation campaign.

Under Fitzpatrick's and Gallivan's leadership, the *Tribune* no longer relentlessly focused on mitigating the church's power. Gallivan, like Fitzpatrick before him, counted church leaders as personal friends. He used the newspaper for the common good, aiming editorials at such things as making tourism Utah's largest industry, rebuilding the commercial heart of downtown Salt Lake — a portion of which is named the Gallivan Center — and beginning the process that eventually led to Salt Lake's hosting of the 2002 Winter Olympics.

Those friendships are now in tatters, the victim of a legal fight Gallivan consid-

ers the worst experience of his life. "My mission in life is maintaining control and ownership in that newspaper" for Senator Kearns's descendants, Gallivan said over a gin martini in downtown Salt Lake. "If I fail, then my life's effort is a failure."

**B**y his heritage and his hobbies, Phil McCarthy, the heir to Senator Kearns's legacy, is decidedly not a Mormon. In a city that regularly dispatches thousands of missionary men in black suits and ties, he wears a ruby-colored sport coat and Prada shoes. He keeps his office stocked with Jameson and Cutty Sark, shoots craps in Vegas, and savors the occasional fine cigar. But now he is on a mission of his own, and his zeal is palpable.

Over French toast and coffee in a Salt Lake diner in December, McCarthy described the forces that define newspapering in Utah. He placed three creamer cups on the table. "In Utah, two-thirds of the people are LDS and one-third is non-LDS," he explained, grouping two cups together, leaving the non-Mormon third alone. "What it should tell you is that one-third should take *The Salt Lake Tribune* and two-thirds would take the *Deseret News*."

But the reality, he pointed out, is closer to the reverse. Among newspaper readers in Salt Lake, the middle creamer cup switched sides long ago. The *Tribune* outstrips the *News's* circulation roughly two

to one, attracting a readership that is roughly 50 percent Mormon. The *Deseret News* points out that this disparity can be tied in part to its afternoon delivery, since afternoon papers everywhere are shrinking. But many in town, both Mormon and non-Mormon, cite the church paper's other problem — credibility. A 2002 poll by Brigham Young University found that 70 percent of Utah voters thought the *Deseret News* slanted its coverage to favor the church. By contrast, 36 percent — a single creamer cup — ranked the *Tribune* as biased against the Mormon faith.

Singleton's arrival was a clear victory for the church, ending a half-decade of deteriorating relations between the two JOA partners. According to internal *News* documents, the church did not want the McCartheys to retain control of the *Tribune*.

When Singleton took the helm, the church received a promise of close business cooperation for the *News's* planned switch to morning publication beginning March 31, 2003, an agreement that the McCartheys could never reach with the church. And *News* editor John Hughes, who won a Pulitzer at *The Christian Science Monitor*, also sees an opportunity with the move to redefine the editorial approach of the *News*, which will be rechristened as the *Deseret Morning News*. He no longer wants the paper to be a mouthpiece for the church or a newspaper for one group of people. As a result, editorials are no longer sent to church headquarters for approval, and Hughes says he has stepped up a campaign against the "self-censorship" of reporters and editors that he admits still occasionally creeps into *News* reporting. "I want it to be a newspaper for the entire community, all races, all religions," Hughes explains, echoing Singleton.

But the tangled tale of legal and political intrigue that preceded Singleton's takeover seems to complicate those claims. The church had tried in private negotiations for years to take control of the *Tribune* itself — a fact glossed over in the *Deseret News's* reporting on the issue — and *News* managers had not hesitated to exert the power of their owners in the struggle. These facts were hardly lost on Phil McCarthy and his lawyers, who have argued in court for two years that Singleton's ar-

rival amounted to nothing less than snuffing out an independent voice.

Like Singleton, McCarthy casts himself as a uniter, not a divider. But McCarthy's family is too steeped in Utah history to pretend to neutrality. "I feel that non-Mormons have abdicated too much of our legislative process," McCarthy says. "Whether it's the *Tribune* or our families, we need to ally ourselves to get more balance." McCarthy's history — both his brother and his father worked at the *Tribune* — also fuels his crusade. He speaks openly about retribution against those who took away his paper, and he compares himself to Churchill in 1940, an analogy that posits Singleton as the leader of the Third Reich, offering false promises of peace on the path to global domination. (At one point, Singleton offered to sell back 49 percent of the paper to the family, if it would drop any legal claims.) "Can you imagine the world today had Churchill taken some kind of a deal?" he asks rhetorically. "The darkness that would have descended over the earth."

McCarthy will fight to the end. Presently, that fight has landed in the U.S. Court of Appeals in Denver, where a ruling expected any day could force Singleton to resell the paper to McCarthy, or forever dash McCarthy's hopes at regaining control. His family has so far spent \$11 million on its quest, without blinking.

**N**o one could have foreseen the events that ended family control of the *Tribune*. The paper trail is too doused in personal acrimony, too tangled by legal maneuverings, and too littered with false starts, disputed contracts, and political intrigue. But its beginning is clear: in 1997 Gallivan arranged what he thought was the temporary transfer of *Tribune* ownership to a cable company he helped found. At that time, the descendants of Senator Kearns owned the majority of shares in the *Tribune*, several smaller newspapers, and Tele-Communications Inc., a burgeoning cable giant. Gallivan arranged to exchange the newspapers and cable ownership for roughly \$731 million in TCI common stock, enriching the family and many *Tribune* employees.

But the deal was not clear-cut when it came to *The Salt Lake Tribune*. On the insistence of the McCarthy family, one branch of Senator Kearns's heirs, the deal specifically allowed for editorial control of the newspaper to remain with the family for five years. After that peri-



**RUFFLING FEATHERS:** *Tribune* cartoonist Pat Bagley lampoons the *News*. Two-thirds of Utah is Mormon, but the *Tribune* has roughly twice as many readers as the Mormon-owned *News*.

od, which allowed the heirs to avoid estate tax penalties, they had the exclusive right to repurchase the paper at market value. For the participants at the time, the deal seemed ironclad.

But a series of events soon scuttled it. With the ink still drying on the agreement, TCI's president, Leo Hindery, began shopping the paper around. He saw it as a political liability in Utah, an institution that clashed with the politically powerful Mormon church. This concern increased in 1999, when TCI merged into AT&T, with its cable and wireless operations, dramatically increasing the company's regulatory concerns. "There have recently been serious threats to AT&T's political interests in the state related to our ownership of *The Salt Lake Tribune*," Hindery wrote to a colleague in 1999. He proposed selling the *Tribune* to the *Deseret News*, noting that among the benefits was "the good will we will have preserved with the Mormon Church and the political leadership of the State."

For the *Deseret News*, Hindery's offer came as church leaders and *News* managers found their business and editorial relationship with the *Tribune* deteriorating. For one thing, church executives believed that the McCarthy family's upper hand in the JOA threatened the financial future of the *News*. "We felt we had to go to morning delivery," *News* chairman Glen Snarr explains. "Evening papers were collapsing all around us." But under

the JOA, the *News* could go morning only if it paid for the costs of the change. The two papers fiercely debated the meaning of this clause. *Tribune* management, which controlled the JOA, suggested that the church would have to pay for a new press as well as millions more in advertising revenue lost if the two papers went head to head. The two papers accused each other of negotiating in bad faith.

So with Hindery's proposal, the church jumped at the chance to own its rival. "If the church wants to strengthen its voice, this may be the opportunity we have been looking for," Snarr wrote at the time. *News* executives proposed a number of different ways to take over the paper. They could merge the newsrooms, spin off the *Tribune* newsroom to new owners, or even allow local university leaders to run the paper. In one memo, *News* editor Hughes went so far as to propose firing the *Tribune* columnist Robert Kirby, whose "Johnny-one-note stuff is Mormon-bashing," while rehiring other columnists. "But clean them up," wrote Hughes.

Eventually, however, the church decided against directly owning the *Tribune's* editorial voice, noting the potential public backlash. They offered the McCarthys a deal, in which the family would keep control of the *Tribune* newsroom, while giving the church indirect control over both newsroom budget and the JOA. The family turned it down, and the church decided



**JOHN HUGHES: EDITOR, DESERET NEWS**  
The paper wants to shed its church mouthpiece image.

## Deseret News

Utah's locally owned daily newspaper

effectively irrelevant, since a clause in the JOA requires *Deseret News* approval for any transfer of stock in the joint company. In essence, the Mormon church claimed the right to veto any future owners of the *Tribune*, including its former business partners, the McCarthy family. The merits of these claims are now on appeal in federal court. Meanwhile, under increasing pressure because of legal complications from a newspaper it never wanted, AT&T eventually decided that selling the paper back to the McCarthy family ran too great a legal and political risk.

Dean Singleton entered from the sidelines, smoothly courting both the church's representatives at the *News* and AT&T executives. Singleton had been following the bitter battle for years. On December 1, 2000, Michael Huseby, an AT&T executive charged with arranging the sale of the *Tri-*

*bune*, showed up at the *Tribune* building to announce to McCarthy and the staff that he had just sold the paper to Singleton. The *Deseret News* dropped its legal claims against AT&T. Singleton got a bargain, paying \$200 million. Two years later appraisers for the court would determine the paper to be worth \$360 million (though McCarthy has since challenged this figure as too high). Soon after the sale, the McCarthy family filed its lawsuit. The challenge for journalists at both the *Tribune* and the *News* began.

For months before the lawsuit, rumors of a potential attempt by the church to purchase the *Tribune* had swirled through Salt Lake City. The story was whispered in boardrooms and at dinner parties, but for three years the bombshell never breached the pages of either newspaper. The *Tribune's* editor, Jay Shelledy, knew about the negotiations from his boss, publisher Dominic Welch. He said he felt hamstrung, however, since he had been told the information in confidence. "We certainly didn't want the stuff to get out in the paper until we had a resolution," explained

Welch. The *Tribune's* reporters had a different idea.

"I was just flabbergasted that this was going on and we weren't reporting it," says

Christopher Smith, the *Tribune's* current Washington correspondent. He was not alone. In early October, Smith was one of about fifty reporters and editors who signed a petition to Welch, urging the *Tribune* to break its silence. Unwilling to wait, someone in the newsroom leaked the news to a local television station, which reported live that night from outside the *Tribune* building. "We came out the next morning with it," says Shelledy. The headline: TRIBUNE SEEKS TO KEEP PAPER FROM D-NEWS.

Thus began a two-year struggle for both the *Tribune* and the *Deseret News* — to cover an explosive battle that affected everyone in both newsrooms. Though Singleton agreed to purchase the paper in 2000, he would not take control of the newsroom until August 2002, leaving the McCarthys at the helm for much of the reporting. Both papers stumbled and shined at times, but down the stretch the *Tribune* came out ahead, living up to its name as the more independent of the two newspapers. When the *Tribune's* newsroom filed a motion to unseal all documents in the court case, the *Deseret News* declined to join. So, too, did the local chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists, swayed in part by two *News* appointees and one from the church-sponsored Brigham Young University. "I don't think we would join in a suit to unseal our own documents," explained the *News's* Hughes, who directed both the paper's editorials and its news coverage. Such blending of editorial and business obligations appears to have had an impact on much of the *Deseret News* coverage of the case. Even after the internal memos were released, the paper still never reported in detail the early discussions by the *Deseret News* to purchase the *Tribune* outright or merge the newsrooms. Instead, the paper ran a front-page story that said, "The management of the *News* has never sought to control the editorial voice of the *Tribune*," a narrow, misleading interpretation of the facts. "It was oversimplified," says Angie Welling, a *Deseret News* reporter, who shared a byline on the story. "I don't think from day one the *Deseret News* has been as aggressive as the *Tribune*." But at the same time, she complains that the *Tribune* too often reported on the lawsuit as less of a business dispute between newspapers than a story about the church.

At the *Tribune*, the pressure on re-

to try to buy the *Tribune* outright. The church then exerted its political muscle. Church representatives asked Senator Orrin Hatch, the Mormon chairman of the powerful Senate Judiciary Committee, to assure Michael Armstrong, the chairman of AT&T, that the federal government would not have antitrust concerns over the purchase. (Since then Hatch has been at the center of an antitrust battle over AT&T's purchase of Comcast. According to campaign finance reports, AT&T is Hatch's fifth-largest donor.) Armstrong also spoke with Governor Michael Leavitt of Utah about the potential purchase.

In the end, however, the deal fell through. At an AT&T board meeting in 1999, John Malone, the former head of TCI who had drafted the 1997 deal with Gulliver, spoke out against a sale to the church. "It was poor policy for AT&T to seek ways around the intent of the agreement," Malone later explained.

With its plan undermined, the *Deseret News* first increased its legal threats against AT&T, threatening to sue the telecom giant for at least \$142 million. The *News* also argued that the McCarthy family option to repurchase the *Tribune* after five years was

# The Salt Lake Tribune

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porters was enormous, says Sheila McCann, who edited the majority of the stories. "We were in an impossible situation," she says. At first, McCann and some reporters had proposed bringing in an outside writer to do stories on the conflict, but Shelledy disagreed. "To a big degree, I still wish we would have," McCann said. To make matters more difficult, the *Tribune's* editorial page became more and more strident as the ownership grappled with the possibility of a Singleton takeover. One editorial pleaded with readers to contact the U.S. Department of Justice to protest the takeover. Another quoted Singleton threatening *Tribune* management: "You will not win against me and the *Deseret News* with a Mormon judge." Welch confirms the quote. Singleton says it is a fabrication, calling McCarthy and his managers "nasty, irrational people who will say anything." (The presiding federal judge, who served as an aide to Governor Leavitt and was appointed at the behest of Senator Hatch, has so far refused to recuse himself.)

A *Tribune* columnist, Robert Kirby, read that editorial with dismay. A former cop, Kirby started in journalism with a humor column about why cops hate dealing with the public, employing an acute talent for lampooning sensitive issues and bridging social divides. Now, at the *Tribune*, he has focused his pen on bridging the state's festering religious divide, alternately making fun of Mormon orthodoxy and the non-Mormon backlash it creates. The nasty e-mail comes from both groups, and he holds no hard feelings over Hughes's branding him a "Johnny-one-note."

But Kirby is also a devout Mormon, one of a few in the *Tribune* newsroom, making him sensitive to accusations that Mormons cannot be reliable observers of their own church. If his beliefs make him biased, he reasons, then the bias of non-Mormons is just as strong. "Among believing Mormons, we have this attitude where at some point you have to step back and treat the church as you would any other major corporation. There are things that the church is not going to like us to do, but we have an obligation to do them anyway," said Kirby, speaking from beneath a graying walrus mustache. "It's very similar to being a policeman and pulling over one of your best friends. Do I still have to do

my job? The answer is, yes, you do."

That doesn't mean Mormons don't have other responsibilities to consider. Twice Kirby's local church leaders have called him in for a meeting because of columns he has written. Once he joked that the ninety-two-year-old church president, Gordon B. Hinckley, did not scare him, since Kirby would probably win in a fist fight. The second time he ruminated about attending church in the nude. Both times he agreed to be more respectful, conceding that it was not his role to mock sacred ordinances or question the performance of church leaders. But all other subjects, he insists, are fair game. When a church leader asked him to tone down his use of racy language in his columns, his answer was swift. "I said no, because that is my yard," Kirby said.

Such delicate concerns, and the peculiar historical role of the *Tribune*, distinguish journalism in Utah. There are some signs that Singleton is learning the ropes. When he visited the paper in July, he lambasted an editorial cartoon by the *Tribune's* Pat Bagley that lampooned — in typical *Tribune* fashion — *Deseret News* readers. It portrayed non-Mormon readers of a new morning *Deseret News* spitting out the coffee, an oblique reference to the Mormon prohibition of certain caffeinated drinks.

"You won't see cartoons like yesterday's," Singleton told the *Tribune* staff when asked about any changes he would make. "We will treat our partners with respect." Bagley, whose biting wit often ruffles the feathers of church leaders, thought that his job might be on the line. "So I asked him to clarify," Bagley says. "And he did a hundred-eighty-degree turn. I have free rein as long as I stay away from the lawsuit." So far, Singleton has been living up to his word, investing



JAY SHELLEDY, EDITOR, THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE  
Singleton rehired him and promised him editorial autonomy.

resources in the paper, dissolving most of the immediate fears that greeted his arrival. He filled seven newsroom positions, reopened a Washington, D.C., bureau, doled out nearly \$200,000 in raises, and kept on the *Tribune's* editor under the McCartheys, Jay Shelledy, who has long needled the church with critical stories. Singleton also promoted Vern Anderson, a veteran Associated Press editor, to editorial-page editor, installing someone known for his aggressive coverage of the church with political views that are in many cases more liberal than McCarthy's editorial page.

Nonetheless, some reporters are still concerned that another shoe might drop. "We are all wondering, Is Jay still going to be here when the case is resolved?" says one reporter, echoing the sentiments of several others. "Some of us think Singleton is just putting on a good show right now for the court." To date, Shelledy says that Singleton has attempted to kill only one story — unsuccessfully. The story concerned a Republican state senate candidate accused just days before the election of using racial epithets. Singleton, who received a call from the senator, said the timing smacked of dirty politics. Shelledy, who says he has been promised editorial autonomy, overruled him. "He has done what he said he would so far," Shelledy says. "My belief is that you trust people until it comes to a point you shouldn't." ■

Michael Scherer, a former assistant editor for CJR, is Washington editor for Mother Jones.

# PICTURE THIS

## The Photo Column Finds a Place

BY JANE GOTTLIEB

**T**he *Philadelphia Inquirer* was looking for a columnist in 1998, and Tom Gralish, a staff photographer, saw his chance. "I applied to the city editor," Gralish recalls. "He said, 'Do you want to be a writer?' and I said, 'No, but give me the same amount of space, turn it sideways and I'll do the same thing.'"

Ever since, Gralish's column — originally called "City Life" and now "Scene on the Street" — has run weekly in the local section, delivering a shifting exhibit of Philly's neighborhoods. He does it with a bold black-and-white

photograph and just a few words that together say something about Philadelphia. He used a portrait of a Sunday flea market, for instance, to report that the laws that once closed city stores on the Sabbath likely gave birth to outdoor commerce. "I'm a visual journalist," says Gralish, who won a Pulitzer in 1986 for a photo essay on Philadelphia's homeless. "I have a lot of ideas myself, and it's hard to get them into the paper."

But "Scene on the Street" is more than just a column turned sideways. It is part of a growing undercurrent in American newspapers, where the person behind the camera has traditionally been expected to be seen and not heard. From the *Inquirer* to *The Hillsboro* (Oregon) *Argus*, several dozen

such photo columns are running at any one time, the most since they were introduced nearly thirty years ago. Though visually driven, they usually include a narrative that blends with the pictures to convey a single impression. Through them, readers visit corners of the community that are overlooked in the daily hunt for the official, the scheduled, the contentious, and the deviant. "I don't think there's enough celebration of ordinary life," says the *Hartford Courant* photographer Shana Sureck. "When you look at *The Best Photojournalism* of 2002, it's all about world tragedy."

With her biweekly "Rituals," Sureck captures Connecticut's Governor John Rowland and his wife, Patti, at home watching returns of November's election, which he won. She spends the day

at a hospice with Anita Lahn, who is dying of cancer, and her husband, Dan, who fears that he will still hear the clatter of pots and pans after Anita is gone. A "Rituals" called "Bath Time" provides an update on a couple who had turned to fertility drugs: "They joked about winding up with triplets. Their joke is now their blessing."

Photo columnists zero in on street life or the back roads or just a person who lives in a certain zip code. They explore ethnicity, nature, social issues. Some do it with just a picture. Newspapers occasionally run more than one column and sometimes post them on their Web sites, with audio. Some get famous, like *The New York Times*'s Sunday wedding column "Vows," Suzanne Kreiter's "On the Beat" in *The Boston*



SOME HAD BEGUN THEIR DAY AT 7, OTHERS AT 3, CLEARING SNOW from the walkway, vacuuming around the casket, polishing the hearse. It was now after 10 in the morning, and they had their first chance for a break.

Across Smith Street, St. Casimir's Church was filled with incense and with mourners. Women in fur collars and men in woolen vests, mostly elderly members of Providence's Lithuanian community, sat scattered in the wooden pews. Back at the Russell J. Boyle & Son funeral home, the pallbearers had waited until the last of these well-wishers had left for the church before they settled the woman in the powder-blue dress into her eternal bed. One placed an inlaid box filled with Lithuanian soil next to her hands; another turned the crank that lowered her into the coffin; another covered her stocking feet with white socks. They carried her to the hearse and

the congregation was by then waiting. When they had safely wheeled the coffin down the center aisle, one of Boyle's men took his place in the front pew to attend to the grieving family, and to remind the mourners when to kneel, when to stand. The priest then began his words of remembrance in the woman's native tongue.

### Our Times

PHOTO AND TEXT BY  
MARY BETH MEEHAN

As ceremoniously as they had filed in, the other pallbearers walked straight back down the aisle and across the street to Mell's Diner, where they commandeered the counter and ordered breakfast — ham-and-egg sandwiches, Italian toast, coffee. They read the paper, talked business, asked for a refill. Then, seamlessly — as if knowing from years of practice just when the priest would

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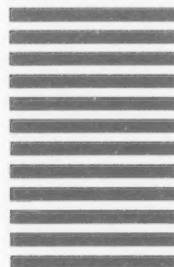
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have," Meehan wrote of one. And the funeral home workers at breakfast at a downtown diner: "Seamlessly — as if knowing from years of practice just when the priest would be finishing his farewell — the men in black coats stood up from their stools, adjusted their hats and went back to work."

The year it began, "Our Times" won a Special Recognition award from the National Press Photographers Association. Rees wrote an article for the association magazine about Meehan's work and how photo columns had emerged.

Burned-out newspaper photographers across the country saw that article.

One of them was Michal Thompson, a photographer with the 15,000-circulation *Hillsboro Argus* who had grown tired of the twice-weekly grind. He began crafting "Photojournal," an artful photograph with a brief, impressionistic text reflecting what he sees around Hillsboro. At first, slightly shy about his public experiment, he alternated new work with his previously published pictures. He has since scrapped the archival stuff and now produces "Photojournal" each week.

Thompson pulled the thread further, sending out an e-mail inviting fellow photo columnists to send along samples of their work. An envelope stuffed with columns has now made two round trips to Hillsboro, with about half a dozen stops in between, in places like Ottawa, Illi-

nois, and Birmingham. Shana Sureck's work is in there. Tom Gralish's, too. So is the work of Scott Sharpe, a photographer with the *Raleigh News & Observer* who became dismayed that the towns and traditions of his native rural North Carolina had fallen off the news pages, replaced by coverage of urban high-tech industry and development. With "Postcards from the Road," Sharpe rescues one slice of North Carolina from obscurity each month. Recent examples include the regular Saturday night jam sessions of no-name bands in Snow Camp, the man who makes famous fried pork chops in Mount Airy, and Cherryville, where townies fire guns into the sky to usher in the new year and drive out bad spirits.

"I feel more like a journalist and less like a photographer," says Sharpe, who not only writes and photographs "Postcards," but records audio for an online edition. "If I could choose my title on my business card it would be 'storyteller.'" ■

Jane Gottlieb is a free-lance writer in Albany, New York.



## Neighbors

**CW** Multiculturalism: A new business, a new way of life in Columbia dating back to 1903.

Most people will agree that some have never met the diversity, however. They have in their hands the many pages to the right of news that take on KPRC Radio's Party Line.

It is the middle of the night in the paper that says "off" says "Columbia" (72) and "on" says "Columbia" (72) and "on" says "Columbia" (72).

## Small town Saturday night

ESSAY AND PHOTO BY SCOTT SHARPE

SNOW CAMP

One large player is wedged in between the washing machine, another to the sink. The stand-up bass player shares space with a shop vacuum cleaner and the fiddle player stands in a sea of fire extinguishers. Sergeant Fuller sticks his head through a crack in the door of the cramped storage room. "You boys 'bout ready?" he asks. After a few minutes of jamming, the group of friends and strangers becomes, at least for tonight, a band without a



NYE



As Kelly Dodson on guitar and Mike Wilson on banjo tune up for a bluegrass jam session, Sergeant Fuller checks to see if the impromptu band is ready to play at the Snow Camp Volunteer Fire Department.

View it multimedia presentation at

SNOW CAMP • RALEIGH

These traditions and cultural past, another window into the heart of the community is shared. From 10:00 to 11:00 p.m. on Saturday, the

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## CJR LETTERS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

ments regarding the FCC push for media deregulation. But we do want to point out that CJR — like many other media observers — tends to overlook the efforts of labor unions to put the brakes on the very trends you deplore.

So to answer your question of who will raise the alarm over the FCC's actions: We're doing our damndest. Our December issue, for example, led with an article headlined: AS WE NEAR MEDIA OLIGOPOLY, THE MEDIA HAVE CLAMMED UP.

ANDY ZIPSER

Editor, *The Guild Reporter*  
Washington, D.C.

### WHO'S PRIORITIES?

On Brent Cunningham's laundry list of questions to ask the Pentagon about its new press policy (CJR, January/February), I'd like to address number four. "Will reporters be allowed to identify soldiers by name, rank, and hometown?"

Why should they? Our force in Afghanistan was initially less than a thousand "Special Operations" troops, each one a highly trained career soldier engaged in highly stressful and dangerous duty against an enemy who has declared that the old boundaries against attacks on civilians no longer apply. To identify those soldiers so specifically simply makes their loved ones a potential target and distracts them from their duties. That brings a new perspective to the phrase "need to know."

It is part of the shameful disconnect between American society and its military forces that so few people in the media truly understand what they are reporting on.

Cunningham's list demonstrates a basic media misperception about the military,

which is not obligated to compromise its operations simply to make sure that reporters can file interesting copy on deadline. The military's job is to win wars. All else is secondary.

FRANCIS HAMIT  
Frazier Park, California

### LAURELIZING DARTS

I agree that many news organizations deserved criticism for their coverage of recent anti-war protests (CJR, Darts & Laurels, January/February). But you could easily have awarded a Laurel to three of the six publications Dartsed — *The Washington Post*, *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, and the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, whose editors and publishers gave their ombudsmen the freedom and space to criticize their newspapers in print. Firing off Darts primarily at papers that do publish such criticism, and ignoring most of the others, might mistakenly encourage more guilty editors to hide behind their technological doorkeepers or claims of hard economic times. If your goal is to encourage press criticism, there are plenty of unrepentant targets available. There are more than a thousand daily newspapers out there, and I think we should all encourage the forty or so in the U.S. that have reader representatives answering the calls.

SANDERS LAMONT

President, Organization of  
News Ombudsmen  
Sacramento, California

### CLARIFICATION

An article in the January/February issue put the circulation of the Paris daily *Le Monde Diplomatique* at 400,000. In fact, its total circulation internationally and in all languages is more than one million.

## PrimeTime



## CRIME

BALKAN MEDIA IN WAR AND PEACE

Kemal Kurspahic

## PRIME TIME CRIME

*Balkan Media in  
War and Peace*

Kemal Kurspahic

*"Kurspahic's fascinating book documents how Milosevic seized control of the media, directed it, and organized the mechanism for propagating the Big Lie—turning truth on its head."*

—Roy Gutman, *Newsweek*

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—Tom Gjelten, *NPR*

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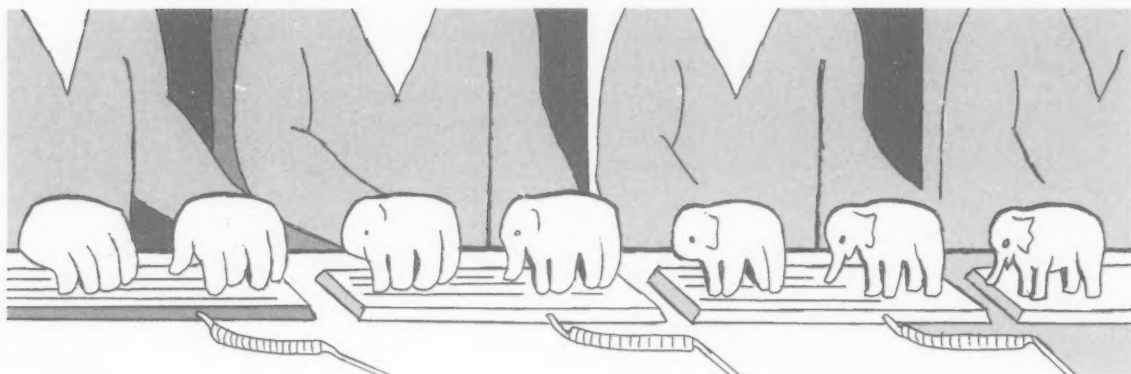


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# EYES RIGHT

*Conservatives Are Winning the Media War  
How Do They Do It?*



BY RICK PERLSTEIN

**S**cenarios from the front lines of the American Liberal Media Expeditionary Force's campaign to rout the forces of conservatism:

■ CNN, which right-wingers have been known to call the "Clinton News Network," chooses as its lead commentator for George W. Bush's spring 2002 Middle East policy speech... Pat Robertson.

■ On the crucial Manhattan front, *New York* magazine fields as its sole national correspondent one of the editors of *The Weekly Standard*; the *New York Observer* carries a regular column by a *National Review* editor; rabid liberal-hater Michael Kelly leaves his watch as *The New Yorker's* Washington columnist to take over the "liberal" *New Republic*, then the "liberal" *Atlantic*, now columnizing in the "liberal" *Washington Post* — joined there by conservatives George Will, Robert Novak, Charles Krauthammer, and a guest battalion sermonizing on the wisdom of war with Iraq.

■ Rock-and-ecadence *Rolling Stone* holds down the culture-war front with conservatives P.J. O'Rourke and Tom Wolfe.

■ In the Internet theater, genuinely liberal *Salon* includes among its cadre of

columnists David Horowitz and Andrew Sullivan. *Slate* recruits a *Weekly Standard* editor as a regular, and even features articles by Charles Murray.

■ On the networks: NBC uses Rush Limbaugh as an election analyst in 2002, Robert Bork as a commentator during the Clinton impeachment (ABC chooses William Bennett), and CBS rewards correspondent Bernard Goldberg for publishing an anti-CBS op-ed screed by moving him to a cushy job with better benefits.

## WHAT LIBERAL MEDIA? THE TRUTH ABOUT BIAS AND THE NEWS

BY ERIC ALTERMAN  
BASIC BOOKS  
267 PP. \$25

With friends like these, my fellow liberals, who needs enemies?

It's one of the best arguments to be found in Eric Alterman's new book: in outlets classed by conservatives as liberal, and even in ones that are actually liberal, the other side is routinely invited in as part of the mix. In conservative publications, almost never.

It wasn't always so. In the early decades of its existence the *National Review* frequently ran liberal, and even Marxist, writ-

ers, including John Kenneth Galbraith, Murray Kempton, and Eugene Genovese. When I had a chance to sit down with William F. Buckley a couple of years ago, I reminded him of that tradition, and lamented its passing. It turned out that recollection of same had escaped him: we never ran liberals, he told me. I wondered about the reason for the memory lapse: perhaps, at this late date — post-Whitewater, postimpeachment, in the full flower of Limbaughism — that there once was a time when conservatives could fraternize with liberals was literally unimaginable to them.

Why do the conservative media fight politics as a life-and-death struggle whereas an avowed leftist like me can look at an old tradition like *National Review's* publishing liberals and conservatives side by side and think it's kind of nifty? That contrast, between conservative bunkerism and liberal openness, speaks to the very structural heart of the difference between conservatives and liberals. We Americans love to cite the "political spectrum" as the best way to classify ideologies. The metaphor is incorrect: it implies symmetry. But left and right today are not opposites. They are different species. It has to do with core principles.

To put it abstractly, the right always has in mind a prescriptive vision of its ideal

future world — a normative vision. Unlike the left (at least since Karl Marx neglected to include an actual description of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” within the 2,500 pages of *Das Kapital*), conservatives have always known what the world would look like after their revolution: hearth, home, church, a businessman’s republic. The dominant strain of the American left, on the other hand, certainly since the decline of the socialist left, fetishizes fairness, openness, and diversity. (Liberals have no problem with home, hearth, and church in themselves; they just see them as one viable life-style option among many.) If the stakes for liberals are fair procedures, the stakes for conservatives are last things: either humanity trends toward Grace, or it hurtles toward Armageddon.

This is why conservatives spy left-wing authoritarians everywhere. Seeing the world in terms of norms and presuming others do the same, they easily mistake a liberal tolerance for diverse options, even unconventional options, as an endorsement of the unconventional options. The presence of gay people on TV, for example, looks like a recommendation of homosexuality. That break in the natural order tempts chaos; chaos invites panic. Which is why conservatives fight by any means necessary to make the world look the way they insist it must look, while liberals are busy playing fair. And which is why it is now more accurate to say, as Eric Alterman, *The Nation* columnist and MSNBC.com blogger, does, that even as it “so perfectly contradicts conventional wisdom . . . the bias of the American media is more conservative than liberal.” They fight the media war ruthlessly, and they are winning.

How have they done it? One way is by lying. James Baker convinced the press of the Democrats’ “unending legal wrangling” in the Florida recount fiasco of 2000 before the Democrats had filed a single lawsuit (the Republicans had filed all of them). Another way is by cheating. When Charles Murray’s *Losing Ground* was published in 1984, conservative backers paid pundits up to \$1,500 each to attend a weekend seminar where Murray massaged them with his argument that federal antipoverty programs increased poverty — a claim that, once scholars had time to examine it but after all the fulsome columns were written, proved to be nonsense. (The same process repeated itself when Murray’s *The Bell Curve* was published ten years later.) And they’ve won by propounding

a Big Lie — the kind that, simply by getting repeated so often, feels so true that those who claim it false look like wreckers and lunatics. “There are certain facts of life so long obvious they would seem beyond dispute,” it runs. “One of these is that there is a left-wing tilt in the media.”

Alterman says that’s dead wrong. For many, that will seem an amazing claim to make. But even more amazing is the evidence he adduces to prove that liberals don’t run the media: he quotes conservatives admitting it. “I’ve gotten balanced coverage,” Patrick Buchanan said of his 1996 presidential campaign, “and broad coverage — all we could have asked. For heaven’s sakes, we kid about the ‘liberal media,’ but every Republican on earth does that.” The conservative press, Republican über-activist Grover Norquist points out, unlike the so-called liberal media (Alterman fliply refers to them throughout as the “SCLM”), “is self-consciously conservative and self-consciously part of the team.” Like any classic Big Lie, the one about the so-called liberal media is based on strategic calculation: calling the media liberal works. I don’t think any conservatives would try to argue that the media have become more liberal in the last decade or so; yet Alterman cites one recent study that found a “fourfold increase in the number of Americans telling pollsters that they discerned a liberal bias in the news” compared to twelve years ago. But only the most foolish conservatives would attempt to argue that this finding reflects an *objective* increase in media liberalism in the intervening years.

**T**he test of any case involving measurement of ideological influence is how that influence affects those in the center — for the people who aren’t already on the extremes are the ones who move most when the balance tips. And to be sure, a figure like Ann Coulter is burned mercilessly in *What Liberal Media?* What Alterman refers to as her “Tourette’s outbursts” — Coulter has a compulsion to call for liberals’ deaths — should be enough to discredit her; he also provides a handy online appendix (see *WhatLiberalMedia.com*) cataloging the ungodly train of errors in her book *Slander*. Same with Bernard Goldberg. Alterman reminds us that Goldberg’s claim that only conservatives are condescendingly identified as ideologues on network TV (“conservative judge Robert Bork,” as opposed to “Har-

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vard law professor Lawrence Tribe") has been statistically disproved more than once, though it's still treated as gospel. And there is a thick, fine chapter on "The (Really) Conservative Media," detailing the extent to which self-consciously conservative organs alone represent a sizable chunk of our media firmament. But Alterman's real flames are reserved for the way moderate journalists, some of whom sometimes even get pigeonholed as liberals, have adjusted their professional standards to get conservatives taken seriously. Sweat, Howard Kurtz: your fawning profiles of conservative lights like Andrew Sullivan, Sean Hannity, and Bill Kristol earn you deserved comparison to the writers at *Tiger Beat* magazine. Kindly turn in your deanship, David Broder: your constitutional antipathy for the alleged disruptiveness of the left is rarely matched in your assessments of the right. Gray Lady, some things are not fit to print — like when you reported that Ken Lay slept in the Lincoln Bedroom as a guest of President Clinton after the claim appeared, unsourced and untrue, on the Drudge Report.

Alterman's research, really, is excellent; his unique contribution to this debate is his dedicated trawling of transcripts for those moments when pundits reveal their inane prejudices during the endless stretches of air they have to fill on cable TV. (In a section on how journalists allowed their personal antipathy to shockingly bias their political coverage of Al Gore, he catches a 1999 Chris Matthews logorrhea on the subject of Gore's three-button suit: "Is there some hidden Freudian deal here or what? I don't know, I mean, Navy guys used to have buttons on their pants. I don't know what it means.") It's stunning to revisit the vitriol of the powerful Michael Kelly on the subject of Bill Clinton, the caving of journalists before the Bush administration during the War on Terrorism (Cokie Roberts of SCLM standby NPR on the subject of Donald Rumsfeld: "[I'm] a total sucker for the guys who stand up with all the ribbons on and stuff, and they say it's true and I'm ready to believe it"), and the systematic collapse of journalistic probity during the high-tech economic boom times of the late nineties. **MARKETS SURGE AS LABOR COSTS STAY IN CHECK**, ran one front-page *New York Times* headline on April 30, 1997 — which would be the way the propagandists in George Orwell's 1984 might translate the phrase "The Rich Got Richer While Poor Got Poorer."

It's even more stunning — an argument clincher, in fact — to read what Re-

publicans were saying in the run-up to Election Day 2000: they acknowledged plans, if Bush won the popular vote and Gore won the electoral college, to fight the outcome to the point of rendering Gore's presidency illegitimate in the eyes of the public. (Chris Matthews endorsed this with the backassward presumption that, "Knowing him as we do," Gore "may have no problem taking the presidential oath after losing the popular vote.") After Election Day, the press bent over backward to treat Bush like the president-elect when he wasn't, and savaged Al Gore for not conceding the "fact" outright. Alterman even quotes self-described liberal pundits Richard Cohen and Al Hunt making the astonishing argument that everyone should be happy at Bush's election, because "Bush would be better at . . . restraining the GOP Dobermans." An acknowledgment, in other words, that a whip-sawing Republican tail deserves to wag the majoritarian dog. History, looking at the 2000 election, will not treat this profession kindly.

**M**uch of this isn't new — he leans often on work by Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Salon's* Eric Boehlert, and tips his hat frequently to contributors to these pages; he also borrows often from his own *Sound and Fury: The Making of the Punditocracy*. All the same it's great having all this stuff rounded up in one place.

There are flaws: the production feels a bit hasty (he reports on events that happened only six weeks before I received the galleys, a remarkably fast turnaround), he's nasty in an ad hominem way to those on the left he disagrees with, he occasionally calls the kettle black (shortly before a chapter entitled "You're Only As Liberal As The Man Who Owns You," he identifies himself as an "independent" Weblogger for General Electric's MSNBC.com). Alterman's style is a little grating. There's lots of throat-clearing and digressing, and he betrays a smarmily knowing insider's tone, referring throughout to what "no one believes" and what "we all know" — excluding, implicitly, those who don't think like media types, the people whom it should be precisely part of the task of this book to try to understand. And here we get to the biggest problem of the book. The fact of the matter is that vast majorities of Americans *don't* trust the media, that their dominant explanation as to why has to do with its so-called liberalism, and that such antipathy, though accelerated of late, certainly predates conservative

movement attempts to exploit it. Why? Alterman doesn't venture any ideas.

History would help. Though a historian himself (we all should look forward to his forthcoming book *When Presidents Lie: Deception and Its Consequences*, based on his Stanford dissertation), there's none of it here. That hampers Alterman. At key points, he acknowledges the essential soundness of part of the conservatives' argument: that there indeed exists a profoundly felt, and widespread, feeling of division between the cosmopolitan professionals of the media and what was messily but usefully labeled in 2000 America's "red states" — especially so on the softer issues, the cultural issues. Bill O'Reilly may indeed talk like "an ignorant drunk." But an analytical question Alterman ignores is why he's so damned popular. Coordinated conservative strategy is certainly not enough to explain it. For the image of the liberal media has stuck, partly, Alterman says, because of conservatives' ceaseless bruining of the charge; but it also has stuck because so many Americans never needed any prompting to perceive media denizens as brie-eaters, indifferent to culturally conservative values. This baseline middle-American distrust of the media that Alterman at key points forces himself to concede is hardly just a creation of conservative propaganda. The fact is that figures like O'Reilly have been a structural component of our civic life at least since 1968 — when a cultural resentment long and obscure in the gestation finally popped its chrysalis and took wing.

That was the year, at the height of the Vietnam War, that the Democrats held their national convention in Chicago, a makeshift band of left-wing protesters came to disrupt it — and the convention site was ringed by an unscalable barbed-wire fence, to be electrified, in case of emergency, at the flick of a switch. Perhaps a tenth of the protesters in their designated sites far from that hall were beaten by the rampaging Chicago police. That is well remembered. What is less well remembered is that one in five of the reporters and cameramen covering the event were sent to the hospital. At the convention site, Mike Wallace was socked in the jaw. There came a moment of extraordinary professional solidarity from the satchels of journalism in response. Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, Katharine Graham, Otis Chandler, executives from all three networks, and the editor in chief of *Time* jointly dispatched an unprecedented telegram to Mayor Richard J. Daley,

accusing him of streetside censorship of a story "the American public as a whole has a right to know about."

Their response seemed to them merely common sense, a rallying point: they, after all, not Mr. Daley, were the trained, trusted experts on public opinion in this country. The police riot was clearly a travesty. "These," Tom Wicker wrote, "were our children in the streets, and the Chicago police beat them up." Who could disagree?

The guardians of public opinion were mistaken in their every assumption. For America did not see Chicago as Tom Wicker did; it saw it as Mayor Daley did. The bumper stickers showed it even before the polls: "We Support Mayor Daley and His Police."

Huge majorities blamed the protesters for their own fate, though many also blamed the media — CBS received thousands of calls accusing them of hiring cops to beat up the kids. Newsies suddenly awoke to find themselves hated the way bosses were hated. And the media's inward, anguished, bending over backward to not appear liberal, which Alterman describes so effectively in the present day, was born. Not untypical was *The Washington Post's* retrospectively exonerating the police, allowing that, "of course" policemen should be agitated by (no kidding) men in beards. Richard Nixon rode resentment of the media all the way to the White House that year; and, in 1972, to the greatest landslide in American electoral history (the conservative Nixon aide William Safire rode the media penitence all the way to the op-ed page of *The New York Times*.) A die was cast; conditions were set. The SCLM had been established in many Americans' minds. What this generation's ruthless conservatives were able to do was exploit that organic, if diffuse, mood; to make it stick long after it made any conceivable sense if it ever did.

And that's where Alterman picks up the story: he surveys the damage. Like the news itself, *What Liberal Media?* is decidedly a first draft of a necessarily deeper inquiry into the whys and wherefores of a development central to understanding our politics over the last three-and-a-half decades. And that's just fine, because when it comes to the present, Eric Alterman does a hell of a job taking the argument to a whole new level. ■

*Rick Perlstein is the author of Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Conservative. He is at work on a book about the Nixon years.*



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# Wild Ride

## Last Stop on the Dot-Com Express

BY ERIQ GARDNER

When a journalist hears news of his or her publication's death, the first impulse, believe it or not, may not be to commiserate with family and friends, but rather to pick up the pen; the problem comes when the journalist realizes that his or her forum for eulogy is gone. On the day I lost my job as New York editor at a magazine quite similar in scope to *The Industry Standard*, I remember having the primary urge to write about it; instead, I did the next best thing: I called *The New York Times* media reporter I knew. On the phone, I expressed regret that I wouldn't be able to cover the publication's wake. His response: "You can. You just have to find the right place to put it."

It didn't take long for James Ledbetter, first *The Industry Standard's* New York editor and then editor of its European edition, to find his forum for grieving. Within weeks of the publication's folding, word had reached media circles that Ledbetter would be writing the definitive tale of what happened. The results of his effort, *Starving To Death On \$200 Million*, deserves to be read not merely as a tale of how the *Standard* lived and died in accordance with the great dot-com standard of the day, but also how one survivor from the wreck managed to put to rest his early post-mortem suspicion that the publication, despite all its hype-wielding and free-spending sins, had died prematurely.

In 1998, a year after John Battelle left *Wired* magazine to launch the Internet business's "version of *Variety*" with the technology trade-publishing house of IDG, James Ledbetter got seduced. Battelle and editor Jonathan Weber recruited Ledbetter from his post as media critic for *The Village Voice* to run the *Standard's* New York bureau, even though, as Ledbetter admits, he had only a passing familiarity with what was going on. "The companies that made the Internet work constituted an unfamiliar galaxy to me," he writes as he attends his first dot-com party. "I had that unmistakable sensation of there's-something-happening-here-

### STARVING TO DEATH ON \$200 MILLION: THE SHORT, ABSURD LIFE OF THE INDUSTRY STANDARD

BY JAMES LEDBETTER  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS. 291 PP. \$26

but-you-don't-know-what-it-is. My first impression was of youth: here were more than 150 people, and at the ripe old age of thirty-three I could plausibly have been the oldest person in the room."

Ledbetter found himself fascinated by what was going on in this shadowy parallel universe where big money and foreign technojargon were being thrown around at will. Despite the anxiety that went with less than full comprehension, he took the job.

Ledbetter wasn't alone in jumping on the fast-moving train heading somewhere, if not up. In April 1999, a year after the publication was launched, the *Standard* employed twelve full-time writers and two executive-level editors to fill sixty-page issues. By the end of that year, the editorial staff had tripled and was producing issues 250 pages thick. By the end of the following year, in 2000, the editorial staff had tripled again (to 129 employees), even though the advertising revenues were starting to bleed.

At the time, growth seemed the obvious course. The *Standard* (like other magazines in the New Economy field) had been sharing the same bed as the men and women it had been profiling in its pages. Venture capitalists invested hundreds of millions of dollars into tech companies. Tech companies were told to eye the public market by growing as quickly as possible. The only way for the companies to do that was to advertise, and what better place to advertise than in publications the companies' executives claimed to be "reading"? In turn, the magazines themselves became fatter and fatter, and the only way to keep a healthy advertising-editorial ratio was for them to hire more reporters and expand operations.

Throughout the book, Ledbetter alternates between waxing whimsical at what fine features and news spreads were going into the magazine, and feeling somewhat uncomfortable with a phenomenon that

was surely getting its share of hype from a growing pool of reporters, who just had to talk about something, one way or the other. Ledbetter acknowledges that when he was asked on television what a company called Bamboo.com was all about, he completely muffed the answer. "The most telling angle of the story," he writes, "is that no one ever bothered to point out my error."

It would be a mistake to call Ledbetter's book an atonement for *The Industry Standard's* sins. No, his op-ed in the January 3 *New York Times* would try to do that. Here, Ledbetter's guilt for being part of the hype machine is far outweighed by his admiration for the publication he worked for. For all its excesses, Ledbetter believes it was well worth saving, and he hunts for a possible culprit. Indeed, the book is framed as a mystery — "Was it a murder?" "Was it an overdose?" Ledbetter asks in the introduction — and by the time he gets around to settling the question, he has examined as suspects a parent (IDG) rife with jealousy and bruised ego; an out-of-touch, disillusioned founder (Battelle); and overspending executives who failed to pursue an IPO, another partner, or anything else that could have prolonged the *Standard's* life.

Ledbetter spends the last chapters imagining some of these scenarios. Most of them are confusing. On one page, Ledbetter argues that the company could have spent \$6 million less on marketing p.r.; just a few pages later, he argues that the *Standard* could have become a younger, hipper *Business Week*, if only the company had spent a lot of its marketing money on publicizing the editorial changes it started to make in 2001.

By that time, of course, advertising had fallen an astonishing 74 percent from the previous year and the European edition that Ledbetter edited had folded. The American edition would soon follow. "It's nearly impossible to see how the story could have ended differently — even if the company's management had been flawless," he writes. Like a grieving family member of a victimized relative, Ledbetter's trauma has come full circle — from denial and anger, to bargaining and depression, to final acceptance. In the end, Ledbetter settles on neither murder nor overdose; rather, he concludes, it might simply have been the magazine's time to go. ■

Eriq Gardner, formerly New York editor for *Upside* magazine, is a reporter at *American Lawyer Media*.

## CJR BOOK REPORTS

BY JAMES BOYLAN

### THE BRASS CHECK:

#### A STUDY OF AMERICAN JOURNALISM

By Upton Sinclair

Introduction by Robert W. McChesney and Ben Scott

University of Illinois Press.

446 pp. \$39.95; \$19.95 paper

This unruly classic, originally published by the author in 1919 and last reprinted fifty-seven years ago by Haldeman-Julius, the old socialist publishing house, has now been trotted out into the light of the twenty-first century. In their introduction, Robert W. McChesney and Ben Scott of the University of Illinois make *The Brass Check* — the title comes from a token given by a customer to a prostitute — sound a little solemn, going so far as to call it a “monograph.” In fact, no writer on the press has ever matched the old muckraker Sinclair (1878-1968) for exuberance and abundance. He is always personal, but always reaching beyond the personal; he did not fear to use his own divorce to illustrate newspaper malice and misfeasance. His portrait of the press of his era (and in particular The Associated Press) is thoroughly disheartening — an institution in thrall to corporate policy and publishers’ whims, using untruths, dirty tricks, and blackouts to serve political ends. McChesney and Scott concede that journalism has cleaned up its act since then, but contend, with good reason, that Sinclair’s thesis is still valid — that America lacks a press worthy of a democracy.

### DEMOCRACY AND THE NEWS

By Herbert J. Gans

Oxford University Press

168 pp. \$26

Herbert J. Gans, the Columbia sociologist and author of the durable *Deciding What's News* (1979), provides a contemporary view of many of the issues raised in *The Brass Check*. Where Sinclair was combative and exuberant, Gans is dour and realistic. He sees the health of the American polity and of American journalism as closely linked, and both as undergoing long-term disempowerment — the public unable to make government responsive, journal-

ism unable to retain the public’s attention as news becomes lost in the swamp of entertainment media. At the end, he offers some possibly useful suggestions, such as changes in news formats and noncorporate ownership for news organizations, but at the same time one can almost visualize him keeping his finger on the patient’s fluttering pulse.

### BREACH OF FAITH: A CRISIS OF COVERAGE IN THE AGE OF CORPORATE NEWSPAPERING

Edited by Gene Roberts and

Thomas Kunkel

University of Arkansas Press

243 pp. \$29.95

Roberts, late of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The New York Times*, and Kunkel, dean of journalism at the University of Maryland, have provided a valuable array of articles tracing what has become of coverage of statehouses, Washington, and international affairs, written by such solid journalists as, for example, John Herbers, James McCartney, and Peter Arnett. A recurring theme is the damage done by the pursuit in the 1970s and 1980s of the reader-friendly, undemanding journalism recommended by consultants, and the slowness of the repairs. These articles originally appeared in *American Journalism Review* in 1998 and 1999. Although they have been updated lightly, they suffer from having waited four years for republication.

### THE CNN EFFECT: THE MYTH OF NEWS, FOREIGN POLICY AND INTERVENTION

By Piers Robinson

Routledge

177 pp. \$80; \$23.95 paper

A “CNN effect,” for those who have not encountered the term, is the idea that the impact of continuous coverage by major media of a humanitarian crisis can cause a shift in policy toward intervention. Piers Robinson, a scholar at the University of Liverpool, reinvestigates the crises of the 1990s — Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, Serbia, and the all but forgotten American intervention in the Kurdish areas of Iraq. His study is complex and laced with skepticism, but he ultimately finds that only the air-power interventions in Bosnia in 1994 and 1995 revealed a “strong” CNN effect. In

Somalia and Rwanda, on the other hand, he sees the news media in the more familiar role of clearing the way for pre-existing official policies. A further implication can be read into this book — that there will be no CNN effect in such crises as the current American confrontation with Iraq, that the news media will revert to their more familiar role of “manufacturing consent.”

### DISPATCHES AND DICTATORS: RALPH BARNES FOR THE HERALD TRIBUNE

By Barbara S. Mahoney

Oregon State University Press

310 pp. \$24.95

Thanks to his daughters, who provided not only access but a subsidy, the life of Ralph Barnes is now recorded by an industrious historian. Barnes was a member of the greatest generation of foreign correspondents, the Americans who covered the rise of totalitarianism. An Oregonian, Barnes made his way to Paris in 1926, joined the foreign staff of the *New York Herald Tribune*, and provided tough, analytical coverage from Rome, Moscow, and Berlin. He flew on an RAF bomber mission from Greece, and was killed, just past forty — no prizes, no memoirs, and forgotten until now.

### THE ASSOCIATED PRESS GUIDE TO PUNCTUATION

By Rene J. Cappon

Perseus Publishing

96 pp. \$7.95 paper

The *Associated Press Stylebook* devotes about fifteen pages to punctuation and capitalization, and has related entries scattered throughout. This spin-off by Rene J. Cappon, identified as the AP’s “word guru,” consolidates this material into one compact volume and offers ingratiating introductory disquisitions on each subtopic. E.g.: “Quotation marks are surely the most bland and colorless of punctuation signs.” In Cappon’s reckoning, the most important mark is the comma, to which he gives eighteen pages, with four pages devoted to showing when commas should be omitted. He regards them as the “virtuosos,” temperamental and likely to cause trouble. They, often, do.

# CJR VOICES

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VOICES, funded in part by the Ford Foundation, offers independent viewpoints on a variety of subjects. CJR welcomes contributions. You may submit manuscripts to the locations listed on page 4.

## The Invisible Primary

*Now is the time for all-out coverage*



### BY CHRISTOPHER HANSON

There seems to be an unwritten requirement in presidential campaign journalism to begin relentless "horse race" coverage in the preseason. Reporters feel obliged to tell us which candidates are leading or trailing well over a year before any primary election votes are cast. This year has been no exception.

Unfortunately, such coverage is fanciful at best unless every candidate in the race is a multimillionaire or fundraising genius. As *The New York Times* recently pointed

out, a presidential contender must go into the New Hampshire primary with at least \$30 million or be sucked under in the swirl of big-state delegate contests where costly TV campaigning is essential.

The *Times's* February 7 editorial diagnosed the root problem as "front loading" — compression of too many primaries into the nomination season's early weeks.

"Front loading" risks cutting the ordinary citizen out of the nomination process as fund-raisers and donors quietly anoint a candidate or two, hamstringing others before the press has informed the public about them in any depth. Candidates that voters might have preferred but who trail in the pre-season "money primary" face all but impossible odds.

There was a time when a grass-roots candidate had a shot at raising sufficient cash after a strong showing in Iowa or New Hampshire to build significant momentum (George McGovern in 1972, Gary Hart in 1984). This was possible because the primary season was once three months long, stretching from March to June. That gave an underdog time to make the most of his victories, drawing press coverage, supporters, organizers, and donors between one election and the next.

But since front loading took hold, there has not been enough time for an outsider to capitalize on an early win. The primaries are packed too tightly together for a poorly funded candidate to build real momentum. Thus in 1992, cash-strapped Democrat Paul Tsongas beat Bill Clinton in New Hampshire, only to be buried by Clinton money in the primary-crowded weeks that followed. In 1996 and 2000 the New Hampshire victors, Pat Buchanan and John McCain, met the same fate at the hands of the financial frontrunners, Bob Dole and George W. Bush.

Even so, journalists have tended not to focus much on how front loading can all but predetermine a nomination — perhaps because they wanted to maintain the illusion of covering a hot primary race. (See "Lost in Never-Never-Land," *CJR*, May/June 1996.)

When they do refer to front loading, news media generally gloss over their own huge if inadvertent role in creating the problem. It was saturation coverage of New Hampshire and Iowa, starting in the early seventies, after all, that spurred the front-loading process.

Big-delegate states eventually began to complain with some justification

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that two demographically unrepresentative, low-delegate contests did not merit the influence news media have bestowed. Gradually, state by state, they set primaries earlier to overshadow Iowa and New Hampshire, which have retreated to earlier election dates to get out of the shadow, prompting big states to set their primaries even earlier. The race backward toward New Year's Day is continuing this year.

So here we are in what ABC's politics Web site, "The Note," calls the "invisible primary." Candidates are active in Iowa, New Hampshire and elsewhere but the public doesn't see them because it isn't focusing on the coverage, which is plentiful but largely confined to dope for political insiders. But reporters have filed some amazing stories:

■ Senator John Edwards, D-N.C., was observed on C-SPAN chewing gum while rival candidates spoke. Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts applied lip balm during the same event. Pundits questioned whether either action was presidential. (*The Washington Post*, January 23)

■ Former Governor Howard Dean of Vermont visited the set of TV's "The West Wing" and got the endorsement of Martin Sheen, who plays a New England governor turned president. (Associated Press, February 1)

■ Senator Joe Lieberman has discussed a campaign job with an alleged symbol of the unsavory values he has denounced — the music and motion picture industry lobbyist Tony Podesta, whom some overwrought critics seem to regard as a cross between Phil Spector and Roman Polanski. "As word of these talks spreads through the political world . . . some feel Podesta . . . will spawn a wave of media accounts suggesting Lieberman is a hypocrite. 'Tony Podesta is everything we're against,' said one longtime Lieberman backer." (*Hartford Courant*, January 31)

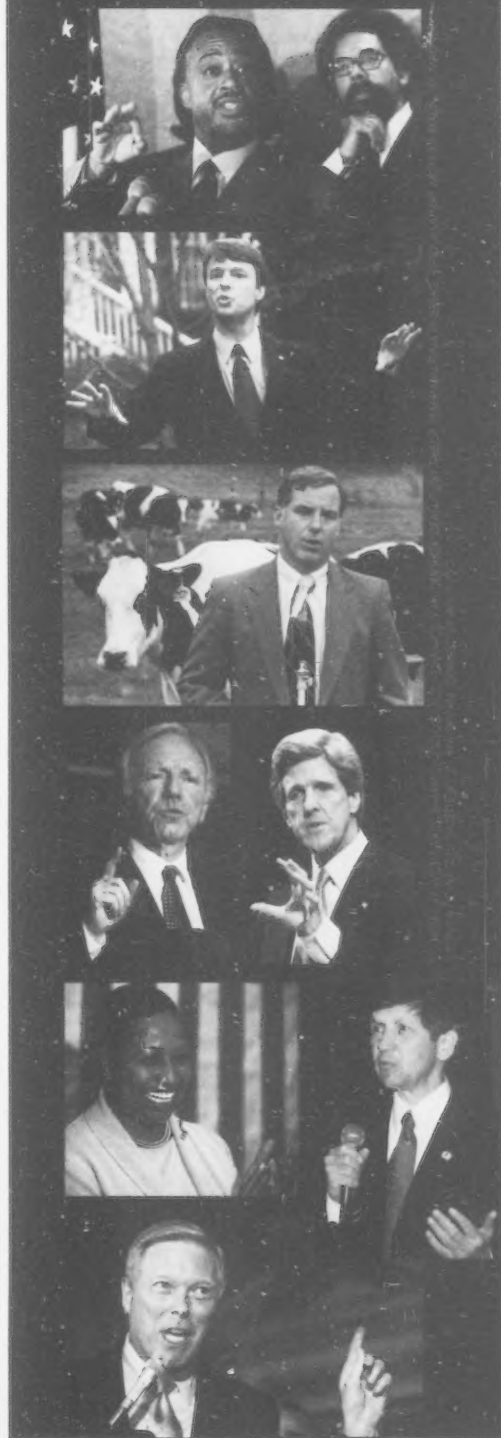
Such items are standard "preseason" fare along with endless trivial speculation about who is ahead. But coverage as usual no longer cuts it.

We are entering what is arguably the most important presidential contest since 1948. Harry Truman's victory that year set a course of "containing" the newly hostile Soviet Union. America rejected the hard-liners' call for preemptive attack and liberation of "captive nations." In the present contest, candidates will have to address how a post-9/11 United States should behave as the sole superpower. Will voters endorse Bush's tough, preemptive action against "rogue" states, even when allies oppose it, or some Democratic alternative? Knowing a candidate hired consulting firm X is unlikely to clue voters in to whether he's up to making life-and-death decisions on day one.

So here is a modest proposal: news media should front-load their own schedules and start full-throttle coverage of candidates' policies and characters *today*.

One might think the audience isn't interested yet, that war and terrorism will all but monopolize this year's news. In fact, voters probably would be very interested to learn that the system is cheapening their franchise. Compelling news reports that put this message across just might goad them to demand comprehensive candidate news while their voices and financial contributions still matter. ■

The story thus far: Democratic hopefuls (from the top)  
Al Sharpton, John Edwards, Howard Dean, Joe Lieberman, John Kerry,  
Carol Moseley-Braun, Dennis Kucinich, Dick Gephardt



# The Deans' Dilemma

*We train broadcast students for serious work. Then they graduate.*



BY ORVILLE SCHELL

Deans of journalism schools have traditionally been content to serve as quiet managers of farm teams for the big leagues — to train young journalists to take up the journalistic cloth. Some wonder whether this is not a poor substitute for learning by doing — just jumping into the media pool and picking up the craft by bud-

dyding with a more senior mentor.

But there are a couple of things wrong with this scenario. First, the hectic, bottom-line-crazed modern media seldom afford the kinds of old-style master/apprentice relationships that once helped the copyboy-to-editor food chain be more than a myth. Second, at least when it comes to broadcast news, there are fewer and fewer outlets where smart, able young people with ambition and a sense of dedication to quality can do satisfying work.

When you talk to the best students in broadcast, there are no more than a handful of commercial outlets to which they aspire. They want to do in-depth work and to use television to its full journalistic potential. But where can they actually do that? Yes, there is still occasionally some excellent programming on local and network television, such as *Nightline* and those few hours for "serious" documentaries that the anchors have hived off the networks as concessions in contract negotiations. But, otherwise, there are virtually no jobs here.

One might be inclined to write off the attitudes of young broadcast graduate students as elitist were it not for the fact that so many older and far more experienced television newsmen are themselves feeling increasingly compromised by the way their profession is evolving. Many of them pass through my office, and, I am sure, through the offices of other J-school deans as well. At the top of their game, fortified by big salaries, they still don't take long to ask if "there might not be some sort of teaching position" to which they could repair to relieve themselves of the ambivalence they feel about their current jobs.

This situation has created something of a dilemma for those of us at journalism schools who accept tuition from these students. We are training people for a type of work that is vanishing before our eyes. We are left to wonder: Are we engaged in a form of false advertising?

Perhaps it is time for us deans of journalism schools to collectively emerge from our sheltered academic lairs and lead a more vigorous discussion of the broadcast industry. What is at stake is not only quality work for the next generation but the shape of broadcast journalism itself. It is not easy for journalism schools to criticize the very industry in which they seek to place their students. Moreover, many deans may plausibly wonder if anyone is listening. The challenge is to get through to those corporate executives whose media holdings may constitute only a small portion of their conglomerate portfolios. This has been no easy matter.

So, what can be done?

One strategy is to find new ways to work with those far-flung islands that form the archipelago of intelligent news programming. Here at Berkeley, we have begun a modest pioneering effort with *Frontline* on WGBH, PBS's Boston affiliate, which continues to do excellent hourlong documentaries. Our new venture is *Frontline/World*, a magazine-format program on global issues that also has an active Web site where students can develop international stories for possible segments or even longer documentaries.

But we also should not give up on commercial broadcasting just yet. Broadcasters are searching for ways to engage younger viewers. Thus, there may be an opening for students and recent graduates to move into the breach with digital recorders and cameras to experiment with a new kind of coverage that might be described as Dogma 95 broadcast news, (referring to a school of production launched by the Danish film-maker Lars von Trier that eschews the artificiality of most television and film-making). For example, my fellow deans from the University of Southern California, Northwestern, and Columbia, and I are organizing a collaboration on a new kind of low-budget TV coverage of the coming elections.

But we need partners. Fortunately, this is the perfect opportunity for a cable channel or network to step forward with some financial support, editorial mentorship, and airtime. Who knows what such a partnership might develop? After all, commercial TV is always questing for the next "new thing." The cost is low, but the returns could be great. ■

Orville Schell is dean of the graduate school of journalism at the University of California, Berkeley.

# More Than A Mouthpiece

*The power and the limitations of the editorial page*



**BY STEPHEN D. BURGARD**

When the *Boston Herald* newsroom erupted in protest even before the actual appointment in January of a former Massachusetts Republican political operative as deputy editorial-page editor, a Boston University journalism professor e-mailed a media critic asking what the fuss was about.

Editorial writers are hired guns to write the publisher's opinion, wrote Mike Berlin in the e-mail to the *Boston Phoenix*, so it doesn't really matter who they are. The important line to be drawn, he wrote, is the one that keeps a publisher's slant out of news copy.

But editorial writers serve as more than the publisher's alter egos on the editorial page. On well-run, influential editorial pages, in fact, editorial writers usually have freedom to set the agenda. Page editors, particularly, have this power, with access to the publisher often equal to that of the top newsroom editor. The Boston controversy over Virginia Buckingham, the former Massachusetts Port Authority executive director, and her leap from the political world to the number-two job on the editorial page highlights both the limitations and the power of editorial writing.

Editorial writers are indeed often chosen because they agree with a publisher's general outlook, but at many papers they do much more than figure out what he or she would say and then parrot it. Some have real freedom. Robert Reinhold, the late *New York Times* reporter and for a time my colleague on the editorial board of the *Los Angeles Times*, said he once witnessed a *New York Times* publisher call to find out what his own paper's position was. More than two decades on editorial boards have demonstrated to me that the structure of relationships between the editorial page and publishers differs across the country. Indeed, personal chemistry often can determine how issues get decided on the editorial page.

This goes to the heart of the controversy about the appointment of Buckingham, who resigned as head of the agency with authority over Logan International Airport amid charges of mismanagement after the September 11, 2001, hijackings. Her lack of journalistic training and her service in the political sphere suggest that she may act in a political way in her new job. If she does, this could harm the integrity of the editorial page.

Editors at most big papers make many independent decisions about what appears in the unsigned editorials. A busy publisher can't always be watching what someone who comes out of politics does in his or her name at lunch or on the telephone. It's okay to produce a partisan page, but readers should not skip it because they think it is too tied to power brokers. There should be no obstacles to any page's ability to make clear and independent calls, praising or criticizing friend or foe alike. Like a chief speechwriter, a good editorial-page editor or writer searches for the memorable phrase. But editorial-page editors' work gives them clout to serve the public interest, if they know how to use it. They generally are versed in their papers' past positions, knowledge today's itinerant publishers may not have. More important, because they follow news closely, and have sources, they know best when to decide or change positions. There is no question about who gets to make the final call, especially on such high-profile decisions as endorsements. But a smart publisher recognizes that subordinates also can keep his or her newspaper out of trouble, or strengthen its position on controversial issues, or enrich the discussion.

The value of a nuanced position may not always be immediately apparent. As editorial-page editor of the *Stamford Advocate* in 1986, I argued in meetings, unsuccessfully, that Governor William A. O'Neill of Connecticut, a Democrat, deserved reelection. The publisher reversed me, but saw value in having an editorial that reflected the strengths and weaknesses of both candidates. (And when an endorsement of the Republican candidate, Julie Belaga, appeared, the editorial did just that. U.S. Senator Christopher Dodd wrote to say that we had made O'Neill's strengths so clear that we should have gone ahead and endorsed him.)

An editorial writer won't survive many big disagreements with a publisher. But just as a savvy writer can steer a newspaper away from embarrassment, a writer whose credentials are chiefly political may one day prove to be a liability. The critical editorial that doesn't get written. That hired political gun on the editorial page may be a loose cannon. ■

Stephen D. Burgard is director of the School of Journalism at Northeastern University in Boston.

# Voter News Service: RIP

*But it's not clear that the networks have learned their lesson*



**BY LAWRENCE K. GROSSMAN**

**"D**on't speak ill of the dead," my mother used to say. Still, I cheered last January at the demise of the Voter News Service, terminated by its owners ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Fox, and AP. VNS had messed up tallying the nation's voting results two election nights in a

row. It deserved to die. Others cheered

because they bitterly resent, and have never understood, the networks' persistence in projecting winners while people in many states are still lining up to vote.

The VNS failure in November 2002 meant the networks' election night coverage was limited largely to reporting the actual votes tallied, without the benefit of sample precinct exit polls that provide specific data about who voted for whom and why. Exit polls and key precinct tallies not only enable the networks to call elections early. They also provide essential information to journalists, political scientists, politicians, and ordinary citizens about how the vote went by income, sex, race, ethnicity, and education, and they help us understand why voters voted the way they did.

Members of Congress, especially from western states, hate early election projections and have held numerous hearings to complain about them. In 1984, Congress even passed a blunderbuss concurrent resolution calling for "broadcasters and other members of the news media [to] refrain from characterizing or projecting results of an election before all polls for the office have closed," something no news medium would, could, or should ever do. Imagine the futility, in this Internet era, of not reporting already released eastern states' election results until California, three hours away, Alaska, four hours away, and Hawaii, five hours away, finish voting. The news would never keep.

The ten-year-old Voter News Service died because in 2000 its faulty data caused the networks to call the Bush-Gore election wrong twice in one night, and in 2002 VNS's expensive new computer software and delivery system, installed to correct the earlier debacle, failed altogether. According to a former VNS managing director, Robert Flaherty, who resigned in 1997, "as early as 1996 the networks had plenty of notice that the vote collection agency was not up to the task, but they refused to put up the money to fix it. It was like watching an old person die. The systems were

deteriorating, equipment was getting old, and software was outdated."

In 2002 VNS at least had the grace to warn its owners of the system's collapse *before* election night coverage began. That was not the case in 1964, when I was in charge of advertising at NBC. NBC spent millions to promote its high-tech election night coverage featuring extensive use of computers for the first time. We promised to deliver the fastest vote totals ever, thanks to a battery of brand new, state-of-the-art RCA mainframe computers. Anchors Chet Huntley, David Brinkley, and their colleagues in New York's Studio 8H were surrounded by a Potemkin space-age election set although the actual computers were miles away in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Unfortunately, when the vote tallies started pouring in, the highly touted RCA computers gave up the ghost. As a fail-safe measure, however, the Luddite skeptics at NBC News had the foresight to back up the newfangled computers with a low-tech army of corporate bookkeepers equipped with desktop adding machines. The old-fashioned system worked fine, and no one outside of Studio 8H was ever the wiser.

In those days, a jointly owned group called the News Election Service stationed scouts and members of civic and church groups at thousands of vote counting sites throughout the nation and in about 100,000 precincts, to collect the returns and feed them to the networks and other news media. For its election projections, each network would also analyze returns using its own sample precincts and exit polls, conducted under the watchful eyes of a hired pride — eminent social scientists, retired census officials, and polling specialists. With so many competing data sources, there were plenty of checks and balances to keep the projections accurate. Testifying as the new president of NBC News before a hostile Senate committee in August 1984, I pointed out that in the twenty years that NBC News had been projecting the outcome of presidential elections in every state, it had never been wrong.

Then came changes of network ownership and a new era of TV news belt-tightening and unprecedented profit demands. The conglomerate owners ordered heavy cuts in news budgets, and the networks decided they could save money by becoming partners instead

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**Lawrence K. Grossman, a former president of NBC News and PBS, is a regular columnist for CJR.**

of competitors in gathering exit poll data. With the AP, they formed the Voter News Service in 1993 to do all vote tallying and exit polling. That single-source system's embarrassing recent failures demonstrate the danger of pooling major news-gathering efforts. If the news pool gets it wrong, there's no backup.

The Iowa caucus next January 19, kicking off the 2004 presidential election, is less than a year away. To save money, the networks will once again join forces to tally votes for the primaries, caucuses, and elections. This time, they've contracted with two firms, headed by the former CBS News election polling veterans Warren Mitofsky and Joseph Lenski, to work together to conduct exit polls and supply data from a single set of sample precincts for all the networks' projections. The AP will collect the actual na-

*After the embarrassment  
of the last two times out,  
the hope is that  
restraint will be shown*

tionwide vote totals. The whole effort will cost approximately ten million dollars, offset by payments from newspaper and station clients for use of the election data. Each network will pay less for its election data than the cost of a second-tier news anchor, hardly a major financial burden given the extra billion dollars or so that television will rake in from the rising tide of campaign commercials.

Mitofsky and Lenski are no doubt confident that they can do the job. Others say they're not so sure, citing the very short

time frame, new election day complications such as the growing trend toward mail balloting and people's increasing tendency to mislead pollsters or refuse to be polled, and the recent history of vote-tallying failures. One problem already causing angst among some insiders is each network's insistence that its own election night decision desk project the winners, even though all will be operating from exactly the same information supplied by the same source. As one news executive said, "that puts a strain on our election desk to be first to make a call, not last." After the embarrassment of the last two times out, however, the hope is that restraint will be shown.

My advice to the networks: On election night 2004, vote a split ticket — *against* early projections based primarily on exit polls; *for* projections based primarily on actual vote returns. ■

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**NAE AWARDS**

*The Power of an Idea*

# Entangling Alliances

BY AARON MOORE

**T**hose who worry about modern megamedia tend to concentrate on the growing size of the companies who run the news business, and on the shrinking number of those companies as they gobble each other up. Too much power in too few hands. A secondary worry is that these vast companies have multiple economic interests, which could give them reason to warp the news. But one kind of economic interest is rarely discussed — interlocking directorates.

An interlock exists when an individual sits on the board of directors of more than one company. U.S. antitrust law prohibits

this if the companies would constitute a monopoly if they merged. In the case of media companies, when a board member is linked to other powerful businesses — companies its newsrooms cover — independent reporting could be undermined, whether by overt outside pressure or by self-censorship.

The chart below lists the company boards on which board members of five of the largest media-owning companies also sit, based on the companies' 2002 government filings and other research. Interlocks with subsidiaries, nonprofits, schools, and charitable trusts are not included. We present this not as evidence of impropriety or colored news coverage, but as information to bear in mind. Let the news consumer beware.

## NEWS CORP. \*

**Total board members: 15**  
 Board members with an existing interlock: 11  
 Board member with the most interlocks: Graham Kraehe (3)  
 Interlocks with the following companies:  
 Allen & Company  
 BHP Steel  
 Brambles  
 British Airways  
 China Netcom Group  
 Compaq Computers  
 E Trade  
 Gateway Computers  
 National Australia Bank  
 Rothschild Investment Trust  
 SAB Miller  
 SanomaWSOY  
 Six Flags  
 YankeeNets \*\*

## DISNEY

**Total board members: 16**  
 Board members with an interlock: 10  
 Most interlocks: Former U.S. Senator George Mitchell (6)  
 Interlocks with the following companies:  
 The Boeing Company  
 Casella Waste Systems  
 CB Richard Ellis  
 City National Bank  
 Columbia/HCA Healthcare Corp.  
 Doubleclick  
 Edison International  
 FedEx — two different members  
 The Irvine Company  
 Jenny Craig International  
 Northwest Airlines  
 On Command \*\*  
 Pacific American Income Shares  
 Pacific Dunlop Limited  
 Shamrock Holdings  
 Sotheby's North America  
 Staples  
 Starwood Hotels & Resorts  
 Sun Microsystems  
 Tadiran Wireless Communication

## Industries

Union Bank of California  
 UNUM Provident  
 Western Asset Funds  
 Xerox  
 Yahoo! \*\*

## VIACOM

**Total board members: 18**  
 Board members with an interlock: 13  
 Most interlocks: Former U.S. Congressman William Gray (9)  
 Interlocks with the following companies:  
 Akamai Technologies  
 Amazon.com  
 American Express  
 Avnet  
 Bank One  
 The Bear Stearns Companies  
 Boston Properties  
 Cardinal Health — two different members  
 Care Capital  
 CVS  
 Dell  
 DND Capital Partners  
 Downeast Food Distributors  
 Electronic Data Systems  
 Ezgov.com  
 Genuity  
 Honeywell International  
 J.P. Morgan Chase & Company  
 Lafarge  
 Louisiana Marine Transport  
 MBIA  
 The Maersk Group  
 The New York City Investment Fund  
 The New York Stock Exchange  
 Orion Safety Products  
 PartnerRe  
 Pfizer  
 Prudential Financial  
 Rockwell International  
 SmithKline Beecham  
 Sonesta International Hotels  
 Verizon Communications (2)  
 Visteon  
 Wyeth

## GENERAL ELECTRIC

**Total Board Members: 16**  
 Board members with an interlock: 11  
 Most interlocks: Claudio Gonzalez (10)  
 Interlocks with the following companies:  
 America Movil  
 Anheuser-Busch Companies  
 Ann Taylor Stores  
 Avon Products  
 ChevronTexaco Corporation  
 ChoicePoint  
 The Chubb Corporation  
 Coca-Cola  
 Dell Computer  
 Delphi Automotive Systems  
 Federal Reserve Bank of New York  
 Fiat SpA  
 Grupo ALFA  
 Grupo Carso  
 Grupo Modelo  
 Grupo Televisa  
 Home Depot  
 Honeywell International  
 IFI  
 International Speedway  
 Internet Security Systems  
 Invemed Associates  
 Investment Company of America  
 Kellogg  
 Kimberly-Clark  
 Knight-Ridder \*\*  
 Marriott International  
 Mediobanca  
 The Mexico Fund  
 Microsoft  
 The New York Stock Exchange  
 Ogilvy & Mather  
 Penske  
 Scientific-Atlanta — two different members  
 Sun Microsystems  
 TIAA-CREF  
 Total System Services  
 TRICON Global Restaurants  
 Unifi

## AOL TIME WARNER

**Total board members: 15**  
 Board members with an interlock: 11  
 Most interlocks: Former Philip Morris CEO Michael Miles (7)  
 Interlocks with the following companies:  
 The Allstate Corporation  
 American Express  
 American International Group  
 AMR  
 Catellus Development  
 Cendant  
 ChevronTexaco  
 Citigroup (2)  
 Colgate-Palmolive  
 Community Health Systems  
 Dell Computer  
 Estée Lauder Companies  
 Exult Inc.  
 Fannie Mae  
 FedEx  
 Hills & Company  
 Hilton Hotels  
 Lucent Technologies  
 Morgan Stanley & Company  
 Oakwood Homes  
 Park Place Entertainment  
 Pearson plc. \*\*  
 PepsiCo Inc.  
 Pfizer  
 Pharmacia  
 Sears, Roebuck and Company  
 Sun Microsystems  
 TCW Group  
 Vincent Enterprises  
 XO Communications

\* News Corp. does not file proxy statements with the SEC. This list is complete to the best of our knowledge.

\*\* Denotes a media-company-to-media-company interlock

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# The Lower case

## Double evils

### Stocks fall amid fears of war among investors

*The Post-Crescent (Appleton, Wis.) 11/19/02*



AP/WIDEWORLD/LENE FRAZZA

*Enterprise-Record (Chico, Calif.) 1/30/02*

### Tools may be left inside patients during surgery

*The Daily Orange (Syracuse University) 1/21/03*

### N.C. residents face up to life without power after ice storm

*Post-Tribune (Jefferson City, Mo.) 12/6/02*

### Parents object to human sacrifice school show

*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Online 12/19/02*

### Traffic deaths tied to drinking plunge

*The Dallas Morning News 12/19/02*

### Study shows some denial from parents on Ecstasy

*Leader-Telegram (Eau Claire, Wis.) 10/21/02*

### Pedestrian hit improperly crossing SW 13th near UF

*The Gainesville Sun 12/14/02*

### Rollins sets out to forge identity

*Orlando Sentinel 1/3/03*

### Helen Hunt offered to city

*The Penobscot Times (Old Town, Maine) 7/4/02*

### Bush: We know Iraq has banned weapons

*The Olympian (Olympia, Wash.) 12/6/02*

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# WE EARN OUR FREEDOM DAILY

The Freedom of Information fight never ends. Every day, at every level of government, there's somebody trying to shut the public out of the public's business.

We believe newspapers must be the front-line, everyday challengers of official secrecy. We must break through the stonewalling, break down the barriers to information that should be free and open to all.

We're most proud of the leadership role taken by Knight Ridder newspapers in mounting freedom-of-information challenges.

This can involve teams of lawyers, cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and result in headlines. Such as the Kansas Supreme Court granting The Wichita Eagle access to records of crimes committed by inmates on parole. And a federal judge's order opening deportation hearings as sought by the Detroit Free Press.

Other freedom-of-information challenges by Knight Ridder newspapers –

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## >KNIGHT RIDDER<

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We're local,  
coast to coast,  
in newspapers...

- The Philadelphia Inquirer
- Detroit Free Press
- The Miami Herald
- San Jose Mercury News
- The Kansas City Star
- The Charlotte Observer
- Fort Worth Star-Telegram
- Saint Paul Pioneer Press
- Contra Costa Newspapers
- Philadelphia Daily News
- Akron Beacon Journal

- Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader
- The (Columbia, S.C.) State
- El Nuevo Herald (Miami)
- The Wichita (Kan.) Eagle
- The Macon (Ga.) Telegraph
- Belleville (Ill.) News-Democrat
- (Wilkes-Barre, Pa.) Times Leader
- Duluth (Minn.) News-Tribune
- Columbus (Ga.) Ledger-Enquirer
- Tallahassee (Fla.) Democrat
- The (Myrtle Beach, S.C.) Sun News

- The (Biloxi, Miss.) Sun Herald
- The (Fort Wayne, Ind.) News-Sentinel
- Bradenton (Fla.) Herald
- The (San Luis Obispo, Calif.) Tribune
- The Monterey County (Calif.) Herald
- Grand Forks (N.D.) Herald
- (State College, Pa.) Centre Daily Times
- Aberdeen (S.D.) American News
- Warner Robins (Ga.) Daily Sun
- The Olathe (Kan.) News

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